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HOLIDAYS
AT
ST MARY'S





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HOLIDAYS AT ST. MARY'S;

OR,

Tales in a Sisterhood.

BY S. D. N.,

AUTHOR OF "CHRONICLES OF ST. MARY'S."

"In the morning sow thy seed, and in the evening withhold not thine hand: for thou knowest not whether shall prosper, either this or that, or whether they both shall be alike good."

LONDON:

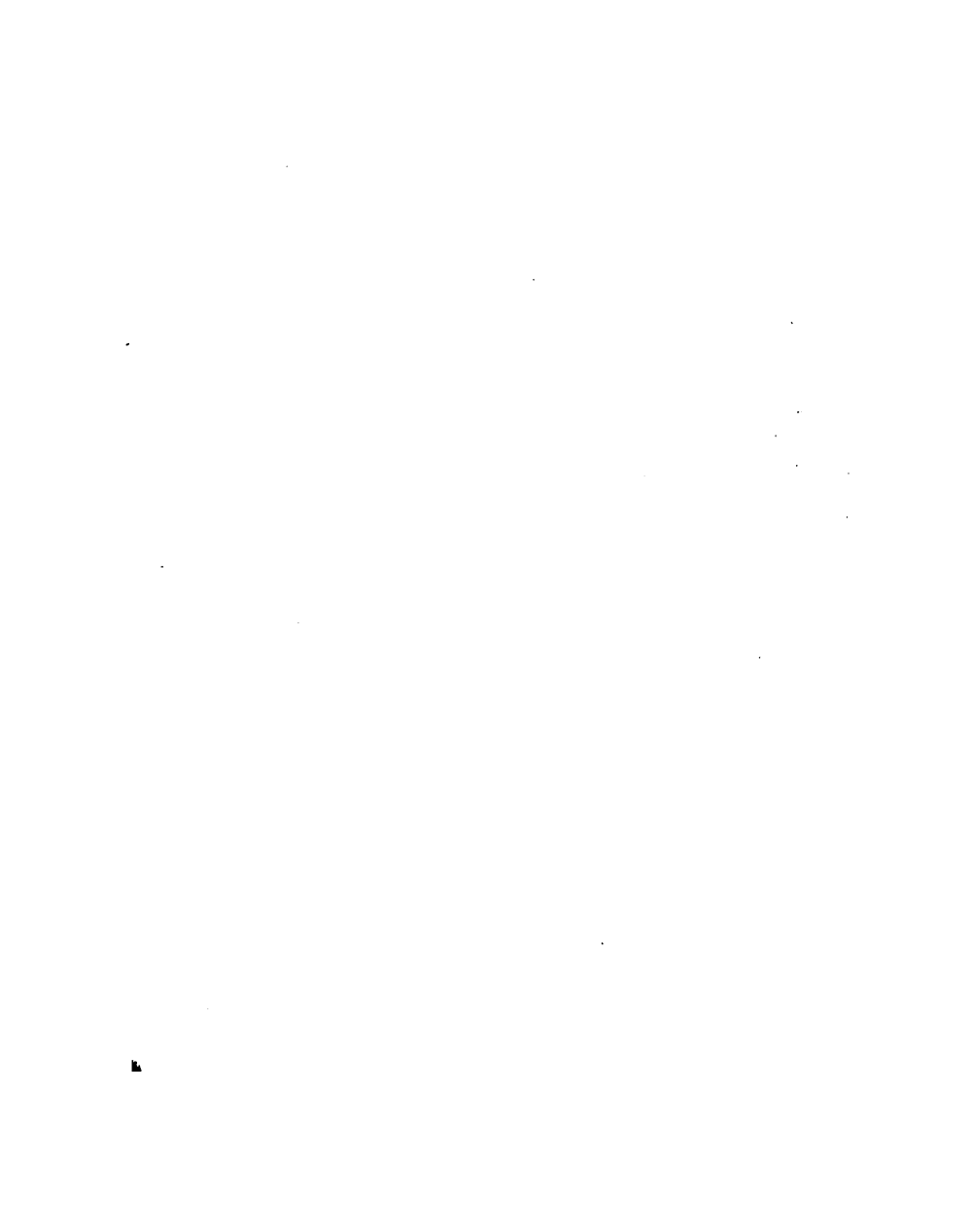
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TO THOSE DEAR CHILDREN,
FOR WHOSE INSTRUCTION AND ENTERTAINMENT
THESE LITTLE TALES
WERE ORIGINALLY IMPROVISED,
THEY ARE
LOVINGLY DEDICATED,
IN THANKFUL REMEMBRANCE OF SIX OF THE HAPPIEST YEARS
OF THE AUTHOR'S LIFE.





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Scene : St. Mary's Orphanage.

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SISTER MABEL	.	.		<i>The Sister Superior of the Orphanage.</i>
SISTER RACHEL	.	.		<i>A lay Sister.</i>
MIRIAM	.	.	.	} <i>Monitors.</i>
MARY ANNE	.	.	.	
MARTHA	.	.	.	
CHARLOTTE	.	.	.	
and afterwards				
HARRIET	.	.	.	
ROSE	.	.	.	} <i>Children belonging to the Orphanage.</i>
LYDIA	.	.	.	
MAY	.	.	.	
LILY	.	.	.	
DAISY	.	.	.	
&c. &c.				

CHRISTMAS.

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Holy Innocents' Day.

HOLY Innocents' Day was always the special Christmas holiday of the children of St. Mary's Orphanage. Then they had their Christmas-tree, their snapdragon, their blind-man's-buff, their country dances. Then, moreover, the younger orphans from St. Joseph's Cottage were invited up, and entertained by their senior companions of St. Mary's.

It was a day looked forward to with eager pleasure for the whole of the half-year. For many weeks beforehand every child at St. Mary's spent her recreation time in making little gifts for her special cronies, and favourites, among her companions and the Sisters ; and in joining little committees of management to decide on the special games and amusements of that delightful evening. For the girls of St. Mary's managed everything on that day themselves. They provided the little gifts that adorned their tree ; they decorated it themselves ; they issued their invitations to the little ones at St. Joseph's ;—it was "their party ;" and though Sister Mabel, the Sister Superior of the Orphanage,

was the fertile source to which they resorted for most of their inspirations, yet she was careful to let the children feel the enjoyment of managing their little entertainment for themselves, and in their own way.

They sent out solemn formal invitations to the Mother Superior and Sisters, which were as gravely and formally accepted, and received them at the door on that festival evening with all the importance of gracious hosts.

A day always to be remembered in the chronicles of St. Mary's was the Feast of the Holy Innocents; but on the particular Holy Innocents' Day of which we are about to speak, there was no Christmas-tree at St. Mary's,—no blindman's-buff,—no country dances. True the little ones came up from St. Joseph's, and plenty of games were contrived for them, but nothing boisterous or noisy; there was no gathering of invited guests, only just the children themselves and "their own Sisters."

What was it that hushed all noisy games? What 'was the quieter influence which by common consent checked the bursts of irresistible mirth which usually prevailed on Holy Innocents' Day, and made the Festival so unlike any Holy Innocents' Day that had ever been spent there before?

The Angel of Death had passed over St. Mary's, and on Christmas Eve one of their number had been laid to rest in the neighbouring burying-ground.

But no one said, "Sanna is dead,"—only, "Sanna is *gone*." No one thought of her as dead,—but simply as absent. The

children spoke of her freely among themselves ; and though they had shed abundant tears over their loss of the gentle child, no gloomy thoughts were associated with her in their minds. She had been for some time separated from them by her illness ; but there had been nothing sad about her sick bed. For long they had known that she was "going to leave them," and now she was "gone."

There was a quiet reverent hush at the Orphanage, but no gloom. The children had of their own accord laid aside their usual merrymaking. There was plenty of laughter still, but it was quiet laughter ;—abundance of heartfelt mirth, but it was gentle and not loud.

At last, when the younger orphans from St. Joseph's were called for,—and had departed,—the girls of St. Mary's drew their seats round the fire—which one of the monitors stirred to a glorious blaze—took out their "recreation work," and prepared, as they said, "to make themselves snug" till bedtime.

Sister Mabel dismissed the Lay Sisters, and joined her children, seating herself in the arm-chair they had placed for her. Rose took possession of a low stool, and sat with her head resting against the Sister's knee. Lydia perched herself on a form, so placed that her head was on a level with, and close to the Sister's shoulder. All pressed as close to Sister Mabel as they could. She was their special and undisputed property on this particular evening they considered, and they were determined to make the most of her.

At first the "recreation work" flourished, and there was consequently not much talk ; but, after a while first one, and then another, slackened their self-imposed labours, conversation arose gradually, and as gradually turned on their absent companion, "Not lost, but gone before."

They spoke of her gentleness and goodness : the patience with which she had borne her illness, the longing she had had to receive the Blessed Sacrament : of the last Prize-day,—when she had received the monitor's medal and blue ribbon, and so on, till Rose, Sanna's special friend—her sister in love—could no longer refrain from tears. The children saw her emotion, and, knowing how deeply she had felt Sanna's death, checked their talk and looked from her to Sister Mabel in much concern.

But Rose controlled her weeping, and presently looking up said quietly, "Sister, does not the name 'Susanna' mean a lily?"

"Yes, my dear."

"Sister, don't you think Sanna was like her name?"

And Sister Mabel felt Rose's tears falling again on her hand, which the young girl held fast clasped in hers, and on which she had laid her cheek.

"I do, my love, I think our little Susanna, our sweet lily, did indeed correspond to the name which was written in Heaven."

Mary Anne Foster was knitting, with the energy she showed in all her employments, a pair of stockings for her sailor father ; her busy fingers had as yet never flagged, but now the knitting pins paused in her hands, and she exclaimed, "'Written in

Heaven,' Sister ! what name do you mean ? I do not understand."

"I mean the name by which she was called when, as the Life-giving waters of Baptism touched her brow, the HOLY GHOST came upon her, her old nature as a fallen child of Adam was changed—regenerated,¹ and she became a member of the Second Adam—elect and precious—flesh of His Flesh, bone of His bone."²

Mary Anne. "Her Christian name, Sister. But—"

Sister Mabel. "But what ?"

Mary Anne. "You said it was written in Heaven, Sister ; were you speaking only of Sanna's name, or of the names of us all ? I mean of all Christian names ?"

Sister Mabel. "Of the names of you all,—of all Christian names."

Rose, with awe. "Are all our names written in Heaven, Sister ?"

Sister Mabel. "Undoubtedly. The names of all GOD's family—the members of CHRIST—the heirs of Heaven—must be in the Book of Life."

Lydia, quickly. "Sister, the Bible says that they shall enter Heaven 'which are written in the Lamb's Book of Life,'³ if all baptized persons' names are written in it will all baptized people be saved ?"

Sister Mabel. "All, my child, whose names are found there

¹ Rom. vi. 3, 4, 6 ; 1 St. Pet. iii. 21.

² Eph. v. 30.

³ Rev. xxi. 27.

at the Great Day of Account ; but oh, my children, let this thought make us tremble—our names, which were written there at our Baptism, may be *blotted out*.” She paused, then added, “Fetch me a Bible, Lydia.” The little girl obeyed, and Sister Mabel turning to the third chapter of the Book of the Revelation of St. John, continued, “Here is one of the LORD’S promises to such as are faithful to the end, faithful and true to their Baptismal vow,—and who have corresponded to their Baptismal Grace—‘He that overcometh, the same shall be clothed in white raiment ; and I will *not blot out his name out of the Book of Life*, but I will confess his name before My FATHER, and before His Angels.” Does not this Promise, ‘*I will not blot out his name out of the Book of Life*,’ show us that some names will be blotted out? Oh, that they may not be ours ! It is a miserable mistake to suppose that because we have once been in a state of grace we can never fall from it. Not only may we ‘fall’ from it, but we may never ‘correspond’ to it. Do you remember, Miriam, that passage I showed you last Sunday in which St. Paul compared a baptized but unprofitable soul to a barren unfruitful field ?”

Miriam. “Yes, Sister,—‘for the earth which drinketh in the rain that cometh oft upon it, and bringeth forth herbs meet for them by whom it is dressed, receiveth blessing from GOD : but—’”

¹ Rev. iii. 5.

Sister Mabel. "Mark this, children."

Miriam. "'But that which beareth thorns and briars is *rejected*, and nigh unto cursing ; whose end is to be burned.'"¹

Sister Mabel. "Because the sweet life-giving dew of Baptismal Grace fell upon it, as well as on the other ; but, whilst one '*corresponded*' to the Grace bestowed, the other '*frustrated*' it."

There was a pause, during which some of the girls looked meditatively into the fire, and Mary Anne went on with her knitting. Presently Miriam observed,

"That is a very beautiful thought that *our* names—the names of all of us sitting here—are written in Heaven ; but oh ! how careful it should make us !"

"It should indeed," said Sister Mabel, "most careful not to do anything to disgrace the name by which we are called—by which the angels know us. And oh, how careful lest, through our own sin, our sloth, our self-indulgence, we make it so evil a name that it has to be blotted out !"

Rose, very anxiously. "But, Sister, I thought our Blessed LORD forgave us over and over again."

Sister Mabel. "And so He does indeed, my child ; but should not that make us the more anxiously careful not to do anything to vex and grieve Him ? Ought not that to make it *impossible* for us to do anything *wilfully* which we knew to be displeasing

¹ Heb. xii. 15, 16 ; 1 Cor. ix. 27 ; Rev. xxi. 27 ; iii. 5 ; xx. 15.

to Him ?¹ Supposing one of you were continually, through carelessness or forgetfulness, doing something which I had expressly forbidden, and then remembering that it was very displeasing to me, came afterwards in tears to say how sorry she was, and to ask my forgiveness,—you would not think it strange that I should forgive her ?”

General Chorus. “No, indeed, Sister.”

Sister Mabel. “And if I forgave her twenty times over, should you think me very silly and weak ?”

Chorus as before. “No, indeed.”

Sister Mabel. “That I did not care whether my rules were kept or not ?”

Chorus again. “No,—no.”

Sister Mabel. “Would you give me credit for any good reason for forgiving the same old fault over and over, and over again ?”

Chorus louder than ever. “Yes,—yes.”

Sister Mabel. “What reason, pray ?”

Amongst a Babel of offered reasons, Mary Anne's voice rose out and clear.

“You would forgive because you thought the fault was, perhaps, hard for that girl to cure, because you were sorry for the girl, and wanted her to cure it, and because you thought she wished it too ; and though you felt very angry, perhaps, with

¹ Rom. vi. 1, 2.

her, Sister, for being such a poor weak ninny, as to be always doing the same thing over again, and then blubbering about it, and then going and doing it again all the same (I shouldn't have a speck of patience with her, I know!) yet you'd be the more sorry the more you were vexed, and so give her time to cure herself, and more time still. The great big silly! she ought to be ashamed of herself, that she ought!"

Mary Anne spoke so vehemently that the girls all laughed; Sister Mabel smiled, and said,

"But suppose instead of feeling the least ashamed of being so weak and silly, she not only ceased to make any attempt to check her fault, but committed it whenever and as often as she felt the slightest inclination for it, pleading as her reason, 'it does not signify, Sister Mabel always forgives me whenever I ask her,—she won't care,—she'll be sure to forgive over and over and over again.'"

General chorus. "How disgustingly mean! What a shame! No girl could be as bad as that!"

Sister Mabel. "You think so? and what do you think should be done with her?"

Amongst the cries of "Expelled—expelled," Mary Anne's voice once more made itself heard.

"You would have to give her up altogether, Sister, you would indeed."

Sister Mabel. "What even if she said again that she was sorry?"

Mary Anne, decidedly. "It would be only 'saying,' all talk and nothing else;—it wouldn't—it couldn't be true."

Sister Mabel. "Why 'wouldn't and couldn't' it be true?"

Miriam. "Oh, I'm sure I see what Mary Anne means, Sister; the girl might, perhaps, have been really sorry at first, but as she never acted on her sorrow, and at last thought it didn't signify, she'd get so accustomed to her fault that she'd cease to think about it; and she wouldn't be able ever afterwards to feel sorry for a thing she'd *once* been sorry for, but had afterwards got used to. Eh, Mary Anne?"

Mary Anne, considering. "I suppose so."

Sister Mabel. "Then if we wilfully and deliberately do a thing we know is displeasing to our Heavenly FATHER, and that for the worst and meanest of all reasons—because we know that He is so merciful and longsuffering—the probability—perhaps certainty is—that we shall by so doing lose all tenderness of conscience, all power of repentance, and without repentance—*real* repentance—there can be no forgiveness. One so sinning must be 'expelled'—you yourselves have said it. The LORD would have to 'give such a one up,' eh, Mary Anne? to blot his name out of the Book of Life in which it had been written? for the saying, 'I am sorry' 'would be only *saying*—it would not, it could not be *true*.'"

Mary Anne's knitting lay idle in her lap. She assented with a somewhat awestricken look to this application of her words—but Rose said anxiously,

"But, Sister, suppose all that, suppose a sinner had been given up by GOD (oh, how very dreadful that sounds!) and yet did indeed after all feel sorry, and kneel and pray for pardon, and long never to sin again, oh, would not GOD forgive?"

Sister Mabel stroked the girl's cheek.

"The very fact that the sinner had yet life enough left in his, or her, poor silly heart to repent would show that GOD had not yet 'expelled' that sinner from Him. 'No man can come to Me,' says our Blessed LORD, 'except the FATHER which hath sent Me draw him;' therefore if a soul, however sunk in sin, perceives in itself the least feeling of sorrow, let it instantly thank GOD for it, and pray Him to deepen it; for such a feeling can only come from GOD'S HOLY SPIRIT still striving in love to win that poor soul back to Himself. As long as we *can* repent we *can* be forgiven. The danger is lest we lose the power of repentance."

"It is as well," continued Sister Mabel, "to have so terrible a warning before us to prevent our growing careless, and presuming on GOD'S mercy; but the feeling in which we should live is the sense of our Heavenly FATHER'S exceeding love and tenderness for us. He does not lose patience with us, as we do with one another; He bears, and forbears, and waits, and watches, and helps again and again; no one really sorry ever cried to Him for pardon in vain; all He asks is our love. 'Will you not love Me?' He seems to say, 'because I have forgiven, will you not hate the sin that grieved Me? Your enemies are My

enemies, will you not let Me subdue them for you? will you not work out the salvation I have planned and willed for you? must I blot out—will you force Me to blot out—the name I have written in Heaven?”

The eyes of several of the children filled with tears, and they worked a little while in silence. Then Lydia said,

“There’s some time yet to bedtime, Sister, and it is such a while since you have told us a story; do please tell us one—just a little short one, Sister dear.”

“Oh, yes; do, do,” cried the children, unanimously, “a story, a story, it is so long since you told us one; this evening of all evenings you ought to tell us one, Sister.”

Now there are few things more embarrassing than a sudden demand like this for a “story,” when you have none at hand in your recollection, and not enough wits about you to boldly improvise one.

Sister Mabel felt herself in this dilemma. “I cannot remember any story at this moment,” she said, “I am not a bag of stories, you know—I cannot produce one at a moment’s notice. Besides, I am sure I have told you from time to time every story I ever read or heard.”

Chorus of disbelievers. “Oh, no, Sister, I am sure you haven’t!”

Mary Anne, flourishing her knitting-pin. “You’ve such a lot in your head, Sister, do try and find one.”

Rose, suggestively. “If you’d only think long enough, Sister dear.”

Sister Mabel. "Then I must think till bedtime, it is my only chance."

Chorus of dissentients. "No, no, no."

Harriet, imploringly. "Make one up, Sister, that'll save time."

Sister Mabel. "'Make one up' indeed, and without any time to make it up in! you most unreasonable children! Besides, what should it be about?"

Mary Anne. "Something serious."

Rose. "About Christian names."

Miriam. "Something rather sad."

Harriet. "About a little girl."

Lydia. "Something to do with Christmas."

Mariha. "Don't let it have a bad ending, Sister."

Charlotte. "Couldn't it have something to do with Sanna?"

Rose, decidedly. "Impossible!"

Sister Mabel. "Serious and sad, but without a bad ending;—about Christian names—a little girl—and Christmas, and with a reference to Sanna! well, these are difficult directions. Indeed I cannot think of any story that fulfils these conditions."

Rose, confidently. "We will keep silence for full five minutes by the clock, and then you can, I'm sure, Sister dear."

This suggestion being loudly applauded, was instantly acted upon. A dead silence ensued, broken only by the ticking of the clock, the click of Mary Anne's knitting-pins, and of divers needles, and the occasional fall of a cinder from the fire. But in spite of the silence, Sister Mabel could neither remember nor originate a tale. She stared at the fire, but no inspiration

came. The five minutes were nearly over : Miriam announced the fact. Sister Mabel saw by the countenances of the children that it would be a real disappointment if something in the shape of a story, however dull, was not forthcoming ; so she stared still harder into the fire, and hummed a tune to herself, possibly to invoke the spirit of invention. Now Sister Mabel had come straight from the Sisters' recreation to her girls ; the Sisters had been singing, and Blumenthal's beautiful song "*Le Chemin de Paradis*,"¹ as rendered by Sister Jane's magnificent voice, was still running in her head. She hummed it now almost unconsciously, and then an idea struck her. Never has any tale been more borrowed, plagiarised, varied, and generally hackneyed than that contained in the pretty words to Blumenthal's charming song.

"Such being the case," thought Sister Mabel, "I may surely make use of it in my fashion as well as any other person." So after two or three hints from two or three girls that the five minutes were quite exhausted, Sister Mabel said rather hesitatingly, "Well, I will try and tell you a story, somewhat serious and rather sad, but which shall end happily, about a little girl. The time shall be Christmas-time, and I will call my tale

THE NAME THAT WAS WRITTEN IN HEAVEN."

¹ The Way to Paradise.



THE NAME THAT WAS WRITTEN IN HEAVEN.

IN a dirty gloomy street of a great gloomy town, down in a dark underground-room, where the sweet sunbeams could not penetrate, lived a poor man, his wife, and little daughter. Ah ! that poor little daughter, a sorry life was hers ! She had never seen the beautiful blue sky, the budding trees, or green fields bright with many-coloured flowers ; she had never, like you children, played on a breezy common, rolled on thymy grass, chased the wild bee and the butterfly, or heard the sweet lark's song ; she knew nothing of the changing glories of the seasons ; her life was bounded by the foul courts and alleys amongst which she dwelt. So much for her poor little body, but, alas ! for her little soul !

She knew of no FATHER Whose Name is Love ;¹ she had never heard of that Home which might be hers beyond the sky, where the flowers never fade, and the light is never dim, where no sighs are ever heard, where no tears are ever seen.² No one had ever told her of that City whose streets are gold,

¹ 1 St. John iv. 8.

² Rev. vii. 17 ; xxi. 4.

and whose gates are pearls, whose foundations are precious stones, whose light is the Light of GOD ;¹ never had she heard of the King Who reigneth there on His emerald-girdled throne,² or of the "Queen standing on His right hand in a vesture of gold wrought about with divers colours ;"³ she knew nothing of the glorious company of Saints made perfect, of Angel and Archangel and the countless hosts of heaven.⁴ Had she heard this, had she known this, her life would have been less dark ; even through the coarse rude sounds around her, faint echoes might have reached her of the Angels' Song, and a reflection of heavenly glory might have brightened her wretched home. But she knew nothing at all of all this. Dirt, and want, and squalor bounded her existence, and she never dreamed of anything better beyond. So her little life passed on till she was seven years old. Her parents and her neighbours called her "Dolly."

The bright summer had come, and under the blue vault of heaven was beauty, and music, and health and joy ; but in the crowded city was dust, and drought, and languor and fever. Fever came down on Dolly's home, and father, and mother, and little daughter lay gasping and moaning on the fetid straw which formed their only bed. The mother and Dolly struggled through the disease, and arose wan and wasted, but restored to life ; but the father was sick unto death, and Dolly saw him carried away by strange men, and he never came back any more.

¹ Rev. xxi. 18—25.

² Rev. iv. 3.

³ Ps. xlv. 10.

⁴ Rev. v. 9—11 ; vii. 9—17.

The autumn came, and over the hills and woods was a deeper, fuller beauty, bracing air, and merry sports, and sounds of mirth and gladness ; but in the crowded city were cold winds, and chilly rains, dank fogs, sickness and misery. Dolly's mother, weak from the remains of the fever, drooped and pined ; her face grew more wan, her figure more bent, her hollow cough more hollow and ghastly.

Winter came, and a pure white mantle fell upon moor and field ; the trees shone with countless diamonds, the clear air rang with laughter and song, and preparations for great rejoicings. But in the crowded city famine and sickness went hand in hand, thick fogs, sharp frosts and colder thaws came and went and brought death with them.

Dolly's mother at last could work no longer, she lay down on her wretched pallet and waited in dull despair for whatever might befall her. Her child's cries and tears brought the neighbours together. "She must not lie here and die," they said, and they carried her away to a hospital. Dolly followed, but beyond the door of the hospital she was not allowed to go. There she stood shivering and crying, and wondering what had become of her mother. A kind woman, herself very poor, coaxed her away, and let her share her children's bread, and the shelter of their home ; but every day found Dolly at the door of the hospital longing to find out what had become of her mother.

One day a smart carriage drove up, and a very grand-looking

gentleman got out of it. He came slowly and proudly up the hospital steps, and not seeing Dolly crouching down upon them almost tumbled over her.

"What do you mean by allowing beggars to squat about on the steps?" shouted the angry gentleman to the porter. "Here, drive this vermin away. Be off, you bundle of rags!"

The child shrank back in terror, but frightened as she was she could not make up her mind to leave the place altogether. She hid, however, behind a column, and lay there concealed till the grand gentleman once more appeared, and entering his carriage drove away out of sight.

Then she crept out and resumed her former position by the hospital door. But the porter was on the look-out.

"Be off, now," he cried roughly, "haven't you been ordered off once before? You can't beg here,—we give nothing to beggars here. Be off, I say!"

"I only want mother," sobbed the child. "Oh, please sir, mother is here, and I want to know when she'll come home again."

"How should I know?" said the man; "when your mother comes home you'll know it soon enough. Now then, will you go?"

"Roger, Roger," called a sharp voice behind him.

The porter turned. A vinegar-faced woman, very neatly dressed, came towards him. "One has to screech and bawl before ever you'll pay the least attention," she said very crossly. "Why don't you answer when you're called?"

"I beg pardon, Nurse Tonner," replied the man half sulkily ;
"I didn't hear you before."

"Then hear me now, and let that little beggar be ; she's not doing you any harm, I warrant."

The man's sullen face grew darker. "You're always driving at me, Nurse Tonner," he said ; "you've never a civil word on your tongue for me."

"No, civil words are too good for a fellow full of such crooked ways as you," retorted the woman.

Under cover of their quarrel Dolly crept back to her former position, close to the door.

The man swore two or three oaths to himself in an under tone, and then grumbled out, "Well, Nurse Tonner, I suppose you haven't left your work only to tell me that."

"No, indeed ; and much good the telling would do you ! I came to say '27' is dead, and you must get the body brought down sharp."

"Very well," grunted the man ; "but I must drive that beggar's brat off first, and if words are no use I must get a stick." He took one in his hand as he spoke, and advanced towards Dolly. The child screamed with terror, but clung to the door.

Possibly from love of contradiction, the woman interposed. "And why should you do anything of the kind ? Shame on you ! a pretty porter, you ! Mayn't the child have some business here, blockhead ?"

So saying, she stood between Dolly and the angry Porter. "What do you want, little one?" she asked in a softened voice.

"My mother, ma'am, only my mother," replied Dolly, taking courage. "Mother's been here so many days, I want to know when she's coming home."

"Why, bless me," exclaimed the woman, "I believe I've seen this child before. Why, weren't you the child that came here with Joan Mathers the day 'No. 27' was brought in?"

Dolly knew nothing of "No. 27," but confessed to having been there, the day her mother was brought in, with neighbour Mathers.

"Why then, that's it!" exclaimed the nurse; "that's just it! only think." Then turning to the porter, she added in a loud whisper—"that *is* her mother."

"Who?" said the man sullenly.

"The body, to be sure, that you're to get brought down," she answered sharply, and prepared as she spoke to return to her ward, when a piteous appeal from the child stopped her.

"Oh, ma'am, please ma'am, tell me when mother's coming home."

Again the porter would have thrust her back, but an imperious gesture from the nurse stopped him.

"Now don't cry, and don't make a disturbance, there's a good girl. Go home quietly," said she; "mother isn't here now, she's left."

The child opened her eyes wide in great amazement. "Left!

Is she gone home, ma'am? how could I have missed her! did she go by another door?"

The porter grinned, and looked towards the nurse with some curiosity as to her answer.

The nurse saw the grin and grew angry. "By the window, for anything I know to the contrary," said she, snappishly. The porter laughed.

"By the window! how strange!" ejaculated Dolly; "and is she gone home, ma'am?"

"I don't know."

"She's gone to Heaven, that's the proper thing to say," sneered the porter.

"It's where *you'll* never go," said Nurse Tonner.

Dolly felt glad to hear that. She did not like the porter at all, and was pleased to think he would not be with her mother, wherever she might be.

"*You'll* never get there," continued the nurse; "the way to Heaven is as straight as you can go, and no one ever knows what you're up to, with your windings and turnings, and crooked ways; the way to Heaven is narrow, says the priest, and you're in the broad road that leads to destruction."¹

The porter laughed louder than before, and the nurse looked pale with anger. "It is a broad road, certainly," mused Dolly, looking out on the wide street in which the hospital stood.

¹ St. Matth. vii. 13, 14.

How far the nurse and the porter might have carried their dispute cannot be known, for a troop of doctors appearing on the scene the nurse vanished to her ward and the porter to take measures for bringing down the body.

Dolly went back to neighbour Mathers. The woman, with her hands in the wash-tub, nodded to her goodnaturedly. "Mother's left the hospital," said Dolly.

"Ah!" exclaimed the neighbour.

"The porter says she's gone to Heaven," continued Dolly.

"Well to be sure, so much the better for her, poor soul! So she's really gone, is she?" Mrs. Mathers took her hands out of the wash-tub, and wiped them slowly on her apron, staring at Dolly all the time.

"Did you know she was going?" asked Dolly. "Will she stay long there? When do you think she'll be back, Mrs. Mathers?"

"Well, to be sure," exclaimed the neighbour, apparently somewhat taken aback by these inquiries: "now you mustn't take on, you know, but she won't come back no more; but don't you cry; she's a deal better off there. She'll never be cold nor hungry more, poor thing."¹

"It's a nice place, then?" said little Dolly; but Mrs. Mathers had already stepped out to tell the neighbours.

"Oh, why didn't mother take me with her?" thought the little

¹ Rev. vii. 16.

girl, and her tears began to fall. The neighbours came and looked at her, and made her cry more by pitying her. One of them observed—"Poor thing, it's a pity, so it is, she isn't with her mother!"

Dolly thought so too; and this remark made her dry her eyes, for the idea occurred to her that she would go to Heaven too and find her mother. No doubt she could get some one to direct her the way. Nurse Tonner at the hospital evidently knew all about it. She would see what information she could extract from Mrs. Mathers.

That same evening she broached the subject.

"I should like to go to Heaven," she said, "and join mother. Can you tell me the way, Mrs. Mathers?"

Mrs. Mathers looked disconcerted.

"The nurse at the hospital said it was along a narrow road, and quite straight forward," pursued Dolly.

"Very like, very like," muttered Mrs. Mathers.

"Can't you tell me more?" asked Dolly wistfully.

"Not I," said the neighbour roughly; "all that's very well for folks as ride in their carriages; but us poor bodies haven't no time to be thinking about getting to Heaven."

She swept the child away as she spoke, and hung her wet rags up to dry. Dolly was daunted; but she pondered the matter deeply. If Heaven was such a nice place as Mrs. Mathers had implied, how odd that "poor bodies" didn't take the trouble to get there! how strange they should leave all thought about

it, and the privilege of getting there to rich people who could not want to be there half as much as poor people, thought Dolly.

"Never cold any more—never hungry any more"—that was what Mrs. Mathers had said ; why that suited poor people exactly ; rich people who were never cold or hungry could do very well here,—so Dolly decided. Mrs. Mathers was often cold and often hungry, and had the greatest difficulty in getting enough to live on. It was most extraordinary, Dolly thought, she shouldn't care to go to Heaven. "Never cold any more, never hungry any more !" Dolly was both cold and hungry now, and she determined to lose no time in setting out at once to join her mother.

Her only clue to the way was in the words of the nurse, "A narrow path, and as straight as you can go."

The hospital stood in a very broad street, and the nurse had decidedly said the broad road did not lead there ; but opposite the hospital was a narrow straight road ; Dolly did not know where it led to, but she felt sure that must be the way indicated by the nurse. So the next morning she pocketed the crust of bread which the kind neighbour had given her for breakfast, and set out on her travels.

She directed her steps, in the first instance, towards the hospital, and then struck down the narrow lane opposite. It led to another broad, if not broader road than that in which the hospital stood. Dolly was disconcerted. She looked about ; on the other side of the way was a narrow street which seemed to

lead straight forward : she turned down this ; and after several hours' walking found herself at some distance from the town, and in the open country. But she was spent now. She had eaten her bread, and now her legs gave under her, her head felt dizzy, sickness and faintness crept over her, the frosty air chilled her to the very bones, with great difficulty she crept towards a road-side cottage.

"What do you want, child ? where are you going ?" asked a woman standing at the door.

"I want to rest, I want something to eat ; I am going to Heaven," murmured the child.

The woman stepped back astonished and called her husband.

They gave her food, they gave her shelter,¹ and the next morning she set out again. "Ask GOD to be merciful to us, and bring us safe to Heaven too, when you get there yourself," said the woman, as she wrapped up some of her own slender provisions for the child's sustenance by the way.

Dolly promised—smiled and thanked her ; and with aching weary limbs pursued her way. The day was very cold, the frost intense. Her limbs were so stiff and sore she could not walk very fast, but still she struggled on.

"It is a long way to Heaven," thought little Dolly. "I hope I have not lost my way. But I have always chosen the narrowest paths, and gone straight forward."

¹ St. Matth. x. 42 ; St. Mark ix. 37.

The narrow path she was then following led her towards nightfall to a noisy village inn. Half tipsy men were carousing inside, bawling and singing. Dolly felt no fear, she was used to ugly sounds. She stood on the threshold and looked longingly at the blazing fire.

"What do you want, you half-starved pale-faced thing?" asked the rough but goodnatured publican.

"I want to warm myself," said little Dolly.

"Come in then," said the man, "come in, you look like a ghost. Where are you going to, child?"

"To Heaven."

The publican recoiled with a look of dismay; the revellers were suddenly silent; Dolly stood and warmed herself.

The publican's wife came and looked at her, gave her warm food and drinks, and showed her where to sleep for the night.¹

"Pray for me and my husband when you get to Heaven," she said, as the child stretched her weary limbs on the comfortable mattress she had spread for her; "ask GOD to forgive us our sins, and let us come there too."

Dolly promised, laid her head on the pillow, and instantly fell asleep. The publican's wife lay a long time awake revolving many thoughts in her mind. And at last she slept—slept late—and when she awoke Dolly was gone.

¹ St. Matth. xxv. 34—40.

Straight on still, straight on, always along the narrowest paths —“What a long way off Heaven is! when shall I reach it?” sighed the child.

She was very footsore now, and often stopped to rest. She had entered on an open moor. No friendly cottages appeared in sight. Hunger gnawed her; the icy wind benumbed her; a weary faintness oppressed her, but still she struggled on. Just past the moor were fields, in one of them a shepherd was folding his sheep. The narrow path, down which Dolly now tottered, passed through this field close by the sheepfold. The shepherd looked up as the child passed through the gate, he saw her stagger and fall. As she lay still and did not rise, he went to see what ailed her. She opened her eyes as he lifted her in his strong arms, “What are you doing here, little maid?” he asked. “Where are you going?”

“To Heaven.”

“I think you are indeed, poor lamb,” he muttered.

“Is it near?” she asked, with her head on his shoulder.

“Shall I soon be there?”

“I shouldn’t wonder!”

Dolly smiled and closed her eyes, and the shepherd paused to consider what he should do.

The night was closing in, the strong north wind had lulled, and heavy flakes of snow began to fall. Through the still air came the sound of Christmas bells; it was the Vigil of the Birthday of the King of kings. The bells seemed to dispel the

shepherd's perplexity. In his arms he carried the fainting child past the church, in whose tower the merry bells were ringing, to the door of a large building. There he rang, and a woman in the dress of a Sister opened to him. He told his tale, and the little one was received at once, carried up into the long, warm, fire-bright infirmary, laid in a snug little bed, tenderly fed, and carefully tended. Dolly looked anxiously round, "Never cold any more, never hungry any more; I have got there at last; this is Heaven!"

For some time she lay quite still drowsily satisfied; but as she revived a little under the care of her kind nurses, she thought she would ask, that she might be quite certain; so as the Mother Superior came to her bedside, and bent over her to examine the little pale thin face, she whispered, "Is this Heaven?"

Tears rushed to the Mother's eyes, she started and hesitated, "Not Heaven itself, my child, but a gate to it, I pray."

Dolly sighed wearily and asked no further questions.

"And who are you, little one," inquired the Mother; "where do you come from, and whither are you going?"

"I am mother's little girl," Dolly answered; "I have come from the town yonder, and I am going to Heaven." Then she lay quite still and seemed to sleep, and the Mother sat by, watching her.

The Christmas sun rose gloriously; in all the heavens there was not a cloud; but the snow had fallen heavily during the night, and over the earth lay a soft white dazzling covering, making it seem like one vast altar prepared for that Bread of

Life which as on that day came down from heaven.¹ The trees appeared a mass of pearls and diamonds, and every little twig of frosted silver. Just outside the infirmary window a robin sang his merry Christmas carol; the air was filled with the sound of Christmas bells: through the window poured the joyous sunbeams, and fell like a glory round the dying child.

The experienced eye of the Superior marked the change in the little face, and she sent for the priest in haste.

"Father," she said, "this child is dying, and we know not whether she has been baptized. Her time is very short now, I think; baptize her conditionally before she goes."

"You know nothing of her?" said the priest.

"Nothing whatever. Dickon, the shepherd, brought her in yesterday afternoon. He had found her fainting near his sheepfold. The only answers I have been able to draw from her are, that she is her mother's child, that she comes from the town, (what town I do not know), and that she is going to Heaven."

The priest smiled, laid his hand on the child's faint pulse, and then prepared for his sacred office. The holy words were said—the sacred sign was made, the water in the little font became the Water of Life.

"By what name shall I call her?" asked the priest. The Superior bent forward, kissed the wan cheek, and said, "By the name of the Mother in Heaven."

The Life-giving Water bathed the child's pale brow; she

¹ St. Luke ii. 8—16; St. John vi. 47—51.

was signed and sealed a daughter of the King of kings by the name of "Mary."

As the water touched her, her eyes opened wide, and gazed upwards with a look of mingled joy and wonder. She stretched out her arms, made an effort to rise, then with a smile sank back, and the radiant happy soul took wing to heaven.

Her little weary body they laid to rest in a grave by the chancel wall. They planted sweet flowers round it, and raised a cross above it. On the cross they carved her name,

M A R Y,

the name that was written in Heaven.

Sister Mabel paused, and looked round on her young audience. Several girls were wiping quiet tears from their eyes.

"This is a very sad story indeed," said Miriam, gently.

"And it does not end happily," observed Martha.

"Not end happily, Martha!" said Sister Mabel. "Why, my child, what happier ending can there be than for a little blossom to be transplanted to the garden of the great King before the blight of sin has marred its beauty? for a little soul with its baptismal robe unsullied, and the waters of Baptism fresh upon it to fall asleep on earth, and wake in heaven?"

"Like Sanna," said Rose, under her breath.

"Yes, dearest child, like Sanna."

E A S T E R.



Easter Eve.

“HOW beautiful ! Oh, how beautiful ! How lovely ! How exquisite !”

These exclamations were made in sundry tones by divers of the monitors of St. Mary’s Orphanage. They were bending over a basket containing an exquisite wreath of hothouse flowers, which had just been left at the Orphanage by two wealthy young ladies, the daughters of Mr. Elsworthy, a great county magnate, who lived about five miles off.

Rose. “But why is it left here ? Surely Miss Elsworthy did not mean such a wreath as this for our little Oratory.”

Rose’s voice was sharp and almost angry.

Miriam. “No, it’s for the Cross over the Altar in the Chapel. But Miss Elsworthy came to see Sister Mabel about something, so she left the wreath here.”

Rose heaved a sigh of relief.

“Why, what could it signify to you, Rose, what it was for ?” asked Charlotte, observing her.

Rose. "My wreath, which I made for our Cross in the Oratory, is finished, and Sister Mabel has fixed it on the Cross."

Charlotte. "What then?"

Rose, indignantly. "What then! Why, do you suppose I should have liked to have seen it taken off after all the pains I took with it, and this one put on in its place?"

Miriam. "Why, Rose, your wreath is made of nothing but primroses! I'm sure I wish Miss Elsworthy had given us a wreath like this."

Rose did not answer, but her eyes filled with tears.

Lydia observed it. "Sister Mabel said Rose's wreath was very pretty, and beautifully made," she observed gently.

Rose looked grateful.

Miriam. "Oh, very likely, but primroses are but primroses, and so common!"

Lydia. "Perhaps Miss Elsworthy did not make this wreath herself; perhaps she only told the gardener to make it."

Charlotte. "What then?"

Lydia, triumphantly. "Why then Rose's wreath of primroses would be worth a great deal more than Miss Elsworthy's wreath of hothouse flowers."

Charlotte, contemptuously. "What stuff!"

Lydia, warmly. "Not stuff at all! It is Rose's work and Rose's pains our LORD will value, not the flowers. What can He care what flowers His wreath is made of?"

Miriam. "We should always offer our *best*, Lydia, and prim-roses are so common, they are mere rubbish."

Rose. "But they were the only flowers we could get, Miriam."

Miriam. "Oh, I don't say anything against them if one can't get anything better ;—what I mean is, that it would have been much better if we could have had such a wreath as this from Miss Elsworthy."

Martha. "Well, I don't agree with you, and I don't think Sister Mabel will either. She said we girls were to do *our* best to make the Oratory as pretty as we could, that it might be our Easter Offering. And we have—and—I don't want to say anything conceited—it does look very pretty ; and I am sure we have worked as hard and taken as much pains as any of the Sisters or ladies who have decorated the Chapel."

Miriam. "Have you *seen* the Chapel, Martha ?"

Martha. "No."

Miriam. "Then you can't understand anything about it. You never saw anything so lovely in your life. The ladies have sent such lovely flowers, there isn't anything so common as a primrose or a bluebell in the whole chapel."

Rose. "What has that to do with it?"

Charlotte. "Why, it makes our poor little Oratory look so poor and common."

Rose. "Charlotte ! you yourself said how pretty it looked."

Charlotte. "Ah, that was before I had seen the chapel. How

I wish Miss Elsworthy had thought to bring *us* some wreaths and bouquets ready-made of her father's beautiful flowers. The gardener could have made up any number, so it would have been no trouble to her ; and there are such quantities of flowers at Highfield, that no one would ever have missed them."

Martha, decidedly. "Then they'd have been no offering. You ask Sister Mabel."

And had Charlotte wished to avail herself of it an opportunity was just then afforded, for Sister Mabel entered at that moment to carry off the beautiful wreath to the chapel. She gave such of the monitors as had not seen the chapel leave to accompany her, and delighted them by telling them she had obtained leave for them to sit up for the first festival service, which was to begin at nine.

Martha, Rose, and Lydia, who were of those who accompanied Sister Mabel, came back charmed with the beauty of the Home Chapel, but not in the least out of conceit with their own little Oratory.

"We did our *best*," Martha repeated stoutly, "and that is all that is necessary."

Miriam. "Oh, I don't say we didn't do our best, I only say, what a pity we hadn't something better to put up."

Rose. "It was the best we could get."

Lydia. "And we worked very hard."

Miriam, discontentedly. "But such rubbish as it is after all."

Rose, in a tone of annoyance. "What is rubbish?"

Miriam. "Why, all those rubbishy primroses and bluebells which any one can get anywhere."

Martha. "Why, what would you have liked instead?"

Miriam. "Have not I told you?—beautiful greenhouse flowers."

Martha. "What, even if we had nothing to do with the gathering of them?"

Miriam. "To be sure."

Rose. "And even if the wreaths had come ready-made from Mr. Elsworthy's?"

Charlotte. "Yes, indeed; they'd have been far better made than ours."

Martha. "But what would have been the use of them?"

Miriam, staring. "'The use!' why to make the Oratory look as pretty as possible."

Martha. "For whom to see?"

Miriam. "Ourselves, the Sisters, the Visitors."

Martha's face coloured with triumph. She turned towards her companions, and waving her hands slowly, said in a tone of mingled joy and reverence, "But we did not work for ourselves, or the Sisters, or the Visitors, we did our best for the sake of our LORD!"

Miriam was by far the oldest of the party, and Senior Monitor; she looked exceedingly annoyed. "I hope," she said coldly, "you do not think that I wished our decorations better except for His honour."

Martha hopped towards her on her crutches, and drew her arm affectionately through hers. "I did not mean to vex you, dear," she said; "I know exactly why you wish we had had choicer flowers, and not only what we could gather ourselves out of the fields and hedges. But I don't see what it can possibly signify if they were really the best we could get. For just think, dear. It cannot signify to our dear LORD whether His chapels and oratories are decorated or not, except as it shows our love for Him. And as to the flowers,—didn't He make them every one Himself? So one must be quite as good to Him as another."

Miriam had not time to reply, for just then the tea-bell rang.

When all the other orphans were in bed that night, the Monitors took their work and sat down to wait till the chapel bell should ring First Vespers.

Every one had been very busy all day, and every one was very tired. Sister Mabel presently appeared, saying, "I have been standing so long in the chapel finishing the decorations over the Altar, that I am almost done for; so I have come to rest a little while with you girls."

Miriam. "We are very sorry you are tired, but very glad you have come to rest with us, Sister."

Chorus general. "Oh, very glad indeed."

Rose. "Is the chapel quite finished now, Sister?"

Sister Mabel. "Yes, quite. They have only to sweep up now and get ready for Service."

Charlotte. "I think it has never been so beautifully decorated before; do you, Sister?"

Sister Mabel. "We have never had so many or such costly gifts of flowers before. So many rich people have sent offerings from their greenhouses and hothouses besides Mrs. Elsworthy."

Miriam. "Ah, how pleasant it must be to be rich!"

Sister Mabel. "Why?"

Miriam. "Because it must be so pleasant to make offerings."

Sister Mabel. "Are you under the delusion, my dear, that only rich people can make offerings?"

Miriam. "Only rich people can make offerings worthy of acceptance."

Even as she spoke, however, the colour rose in Miriam's face, and she answered the raising of Sister Mabel's eye-brows by adding hastily—"Of course there was the widow's mite—but—"

Sister Mabel. "'But' what?"

Nothing, however, followed Miriam's "but," so Sister Mabel continued: "Don't you think we had better alter your sentence a little and say—'Only the rich can make offerings worth looking at?' And there I perfectly agree with you; but I will maintain against all comers that the things best worth looking at are by no means—or indeed often—the things best worth 'acceptance.'"

The Monitors glanced at each other, and little by little their discussion over Miss Elsworthy's wreath was repeated to Sister Mabel. She listened with great interest, and after a few words

of hearty agreement with Martha's views, she said, "You *girls* have yet to learn that the poor have *more* in their power in *the* way of making 'acceptable' offerings than the rich, for," she added, observing the look of astonishment in the countenances of all the girls, "those who give of their abundance can scarcely ever know what it is to give by personal effort and strict self-denial. And it is the effort and self-denial, with *love* for the motive, which make an acceptable offering; acceptable, that is, in His eyes, to whom the rarest hothouse flowers, Miriam, can be but 'rubbish.'"

"Ah!" ejaculated Miriam, glancing towards Martha, who smiled and looked down on her work.

Sister Mabel. "You girls are fond of stories; if you like—I think there is time—I will—"

Chorus. "Tell us a story! do you really mean that, Sister?"

Sister Mabel. "Well, yes. One has just come into my head which my father told me years ago, when I had made the same mistake as Miriam and Charlotte, of supposing that an 'offering' could not be an offering unless it were, in the eyes of mere beholders, *worth looking at.*"

Chorus. "How delightful! How nice! How kind! Oh, thank you, Sister!"

Sister Mabel smiling. "My tale is exceedingly appropriate to this evening, for it is called

THE EASTER OFFERING."



THE EASTER OFFERING.

AMY, the orphan, got her living by selling flowers in the streets. A few miles from the town was a wood, where, in the spring, wild flowers grew in abundance, and there, as long as the spring flowers lasted, Amy daily replenished her basket. It was a very precarious living. Sometimes she hawked her poor little nosegays about in vain till they were quite faded, and then poor Amy would have to go supperless to bed; at other times, however, she would have tolerable success, and could earn enough to procure her a frugal meal. Then little Amy would betake herself to the church in the market-place, and kneeling down before the altar thank the Giver of all good.

In the winter, when there were no flowers, it was a hard struggle to live, but Amy managed to do so somehow; an errand here, a little work there, kept the willing child from starving, and every Sunday saw her kneeling in the church returning thanks for her daily bread.

Lent came, and the churches shrouded their splendours, and

the voices of the preachers called on the people to fast and pray. They could not fast whose life was one long abstinence, "but I can pray," said little Amy ; and day by day she knelt in humble adoration, and listened to the words of the preacher, as he endeavoured to make ready the hearts of the people, that they might watch through the long hours of the Holy Week in true sorrow for the sins that had caused their SAVIOUR'S agony.

Only now and then, at spare moments, could Amy do this, her whole life was one anxious struggle for food. But on the holy Thursday—Maundy Thursday as you know it is called—the day of our dearest LORD'S betrayal, when her day's work was over, she turned her weary steps towards the church.

Sitting on the floor near the pulpit, she listened to the oft-told tale of what her LORD had done for her,—she heard of the Wondrous Feast He had provided,¹ on that solemn Thursday night, of Which "whosoever eateth shall live for ever,"²—she heard how It was Healing to the sick, Food to the hungry, Strength to the weak, Comfort for the sad, Rapture to the joyful, Pardon to the sinner, Manna to the Saint ; and her heart beat high to think that this Food of Heaven, this more than Angels' Bread, was spread for such as she, that in another year, perchance, even she might claim It, and partaking of It would

¹ St. Matth. xxvi. 26, &c. ; St. Mark xiv. 22, &c. ; St. Luke xxii. 14, &c.

² St. John vi. 53—58.

be one with the Source of Life Himself. Then she heard of His foul betrayal, of the insults heaped upon Him, and bitter blows :—how the whole of that long Thursday night was one long agony to Him. Her tears streamed down her cheeks. “I will not go home,” she said, “I will not go to sleep. I did not sleep whilst my father lay dying ; shall I sleep when my Great King, my Blessed SAVIOUR endures such agony for me ?”

So when the congregation left the church, Amy stayed behind. The lights were put out, the sacristan locked the doors, and then Amy crept from her concealment, and kneeling before the altar tried to realise the scene of that sad Thursday night, and watch with the LORD throughout His bitter sufferings.

“The spirit truly was willing, but the flesh was very weak.”¹ In a little while, the child’s head drooped, her eyes closed, a heavy sleep fell on her, and she sank in dreamless slumber on the cold church floor.

She woke half frozen the next morning, and stared round her in perplexity. The rising sun shone dimly through the great East Window, but the church was still wrapped in deep shadows. “How came I here ?” asked Amy. In her sleepy bewilderment she could not at first determine whether it was morning or evening. But at last recollection returned, and the remem-

¹ St. Matth. xxvi. 41.

brance of how she had intended, as the only offering within her power, to watch that night with her suffering LORD and SAVIOUR.

"And I have failed," thought she bitterly, "I could not even do that ;—there is nothing I can do ;—no offering I can make ;—the rich have so many ways,—so many means of serving,—so many things to offer : how happy they must be ! but I have *nothing*."

The tears rolled down her cheeks ; she was very cold, and very weary, very hungry and very sad ; but she did not know, as she crouched on the pavement, and gazed through her tears on the altar already stripped for the deep mourning of that day just breaking, that she was offering to the Agonized SAVIOUR the most precious sacrifice a human heart can give—the myrrh of suffering for true love's sake ; the "spikenard very precious" of longing adoration ; the frankincense of lowliness and self-contempt ; the gold of pure intention.

The beggar's offering went up before the throne of GOD, she had "done what she could," she was accepted.

But Amy did not know this, she thought she had failed, and when the sacristan unlocked the church she went out sadly, sighing to herself, "The poor can do nothing."

A little later and the churches were thronged ; solemn knells rang through the city ; rich and poor knelt together in awe-struck contemplation of the tremendous Sacrifice of Calvary, Good Friday's fearful Mystery.

From twelve o'clock till three they counted the moments of His Death Agony—the Agony of Him Whose death was their life. GOD made Man suffering man's agony ; GOD made Man tasting man's death.

The churches were thronged ; all those who *loved* their LORD were there, and many who only feared Him, and those who neither loved nor feared went their ways and turned the Anniversary of their SAVIOUR'S Death into a day of feasting and amusement.

Amongst those who loved—who loved too much to fear—knelt Amy. Self was forgotten. In spirit she knelt on Calvary. She had no thought for any now but Him, her LORD, her Life ; for any suffering, any grief but His. No thoughts of her helplessness, her feebleness, troubled her now. She could do nothing, it was true, but neither could those with whom she watched—the Mother—the Magdalene—the Beloved Disciple. All were alike helpless, useless, at that offering up of the Great Sacrifice ; *all* must kneel outside whilst the Great High Priest went in Alone into the Holy of Holies, offering the Blood of the Eternal Covenant before the mercy-seat of GOD.¹

All must stand waiting by. Not even the Second Eve, her soul pierced with the sword—the Mother of all living, bringing forth her children in sorrow—the Queen standing on the King's right hand, her vesture golden with His glory, and embroidered

¹ Heb. vii. 27 ; ix. 11, 12.

with the purple of His Blood, even she could do nothing ^{but} unite herself to that great sacrifice—worship and love.

The beloved Disciple must stand waiting by. He cannot help; he cannot comfort; he might have helped and comforted once¹—now he can do nothing. He cannot fold the Victim in his arms, and pillow that agonised Head upon his breast—the Victim must die alone; the Disciple can only offer himself at the foot of that awful altar—worship and love.

And the Magdalene, bowed down by the weight of her sins —“sins as many as the hairs of her head,”² who cannot look up by reason of the iniquity for which this great sacrifice is offered—can only bow herself lower and lower at the Cross's foot, whilst the holy Blood falls slowly on her drop by drop, cleansing from all impurity, purifying from all sin; and, offering herself—her sin—her misery—at the foot of that Cross—worship and love.

And what these do the beggar child can do—*wait* by the Cross in wonder, pity, and awe, kneel at the Cross's foot—worship and love.

The great day of mourning ended, the worshippers returned to their homes and employments,—some with softened chastened hearts to hallow by the sanctifying remembrance of that day's mystery every act of their daily life; others, to forget

¹ St. Matth. xxvi. 36—46.

² Ps. xl. 12. (P. B. 15.)

after a while their solemn impressions, so that the next Good Friday would find them no further advanced in holiness than the last.

Amy, the flower girl, betook herself to the woods outside the city to gather a store of flowers for the next day's market, and on the morning of Easter Eve she started with a well-laden basket offering her fresh bunches of primroses and violets to the passers by. She had never had so quick a sale. About noon her basket was empty, and with a light heart she mounted the steps of the church near the market intending to return thanks before the altar, according to her custom, for the mercies of the day. But just as she reached the door an eager voice called her, and an eager hand pulled her back.

"Flower girl, flower girl, uncover your basket; I want some flowers, let me see what you've got."

Amy turned. A beautiful child about six years of age, accompanied by a servant, had followed her up the church steps.

"My flowers are all gone, little lady," said Amy, smiling; "see," added she, uncovering her basket, "I have not one left."

"How provoking! how very provoking!" exclaimed the little girl petulantly.

"What is provoking?" said a lady who just then came up.

The child turned quickly round. "It is provoking that this girl has sold all her flowers; all the primroses are sold in the market, and I wanted primroses so much."

The lady smiled as she stooped and kissed the little pouting

face, "And why are you so eager about primroses to-day, Julia, as almost to lose your temper about them?"

"Because, auntie," answered the child, "to-morrow is Easter Day you know, and I want to buy some flowers to help decorate the church. Mamma has given such beauties, oh, such splendid ones—they are to be put on the altar—only think! I am only a little child, auntie, but I've saved up all my pence to buy a few primroses,—mamma said I might. They won't be worth much, but I thought they'd look so pretty in moss round the foot of the font, as if they were growing, auntie, don't you think so? or, if they weren't good enough for the font, to lie in one of the windows, or perhaps in a little corner of the chancel screen; eh, auntie? but there isn't one to be had in the market, and this girl has sold all hers."

Again the rosy lips pouted, and tears stood in the child's blue eyes.

"I am sorry for your disappointment, dear," said the lady, "but we will see if we cannot get something that will do as well as primroses. Come back with me to the market, and whatever you get may it be accepted. I do not doubt but that it will; the offering of a loving heart, however small and poor, is always accepted of the LORD and precious."

They passed on. The flower girl watched them till they were out of sight.

"The offering of a loving heart, however small and poor, is always accepted of the LORD and precious." She repeated these words to herself.

Why here was an offering suggested which even she could make. "How foolish," pondered she, "never to have thought of that before ! Flowers ! primroses ! why, even I can offer them, and the lady said they would certainly be accepted." Her resolution was immediately taken ; but there was no time to be lost. The primrose wood was at a considerable distance from the town, a long weary walk, and the return would be up-hill all the way. But she did not stop to consider that.

Hastily passing into the church, she knelt for a few minutes in silent thanksgiving and adoration before the altar ; then taking up her basket started off on her errand.

Amy was tired and hungry, and the way was dreary and long. The weather too had changed ; the wind had shifted north, and after a while a thick sleet fell which soon drenched the child's poor rags. But still she held on her way. The wind was dead against her, the half-frozen rain fell thicker. Now and then, for very weariness she was forced to sit down and rest. Still her heart did not fail, or her resolution once falter. She reached the wood at last. The tangled grass and dripping trees drenched her anew. Her fingers were so numb she could scarcely gather the wet flowers ; her teeth chattered and her limbs shook ; but still she went from tuft to tuft, stooping and gathering with painful care till her basket was full of dripping flowers.

Then she turned back, but oh, how wearily ! It seemed as if the town would never come. The long hill tried her sadly,—

the evening began to close in. The rain had ceased, but the cold north wind blew keener than ever. By the time she reached the first street poor Amy was nearly spent. As she set down her basket for a moment on a door step to rest, a bustling cheery-looking woman brushed past her, pushed open the house door, and displayed a cozy parlour with a blazing fire whose light fell on the pale draggled child on the step.

"Why, bless me," exclaimed the woman, whom Amy now recognized as one she had often seen in the market, "if that isn't Amy, the flower girl! Why, child, you're dripping wet, and as pale as death. Come in here and dry yourself a bit."

Amy joyfully obeyed. She bent thankfully over the cheerful hearth, warmed her numbed limbs, dried her wet clothes; and when her kind hostess had brought her hot coffee, and a plentiful meal, her spirits revived, and she asked leave to arrange her flowers into bunches by the fire before issuing again into the cold wet streets.

"Ay, to be sure," said the good-natured woman; and Amy opening her basket proceeded to examine her flower store.

But oh, what a disappointment awaited her. The flowers had been gathered heavy with wet, and had so bruised each other in the crowded basket that Amy saw at once that the greater number were absolutely spoilt, and totally useless. So all her trouble and weariness had been in vain, she burst into tears at the thought.

The good woman looked on with much concern. "To be

sure they're worth nothing," she said, "but don't cry; was they an order, child?"

"They were for the church, to-morrow," replied Amy, trying to still her weeping.

"Ah, then it don't signify one pin; whoever ordered them should have done it sooner; no flowers was to be taken in after noon to-day. It's a pity you've had that weary walk for nothing, and so wet as you are too! But there," she added, seeing Amy's grief redoubled, "don't cry so, you make me bad to see you. Sure the lady—whoever she was that ordered them,—when she knows all the trouble you took will pay you; never fear. It's not your fault she ordered them too late, and not your fault the rain spoilt them neither."

But this comfort was no comfort at all to Amy; the utter uselessness of what she had done overcame her. She dried her tears, nevertheless, thanked her kind hostess, and throwing away the greater part of her damaged flowers, tied the rest, she scarcely knew why, into a bunch. Then with hearty, grateful, thanks for her entertainment she left the house, and wended her way sadly and slowly to the garret in which she slept. There she placed the flowers in water in a broken jug, and sitting down before them, fell into deep thought.

"How happy the rich must be! how much they can do for GOD, how much they have to offer!" Such was the burden of all her meditations. "What great things are in their power, but the poor can do nothing!"

Wearied out and spiritless she lay down and slept. The hours crept slowly on, the whole city was wrapped in sleep. In the deep hush and stillness the hours were chimed from the grey church tower. Midnight came and went. Easter Eve had become Easter morning.

The whole city slumbered and slept, but some there were who could say with truth, "I sleep, but my heart waketh ;"¹ and these were soon astir, watching for the first tokens of day in the east, and at the first paling of the eastern sky, a joyous Easter peal burst from the church tower of the market place, ringing in gladness, ringing in exultation, "The LORD is risen, Alleluia."

The beggar girl rose from her miserable couch and looked out into the still quiet streets. Then she threw her ragged cloak around her, took her primroses in her hand and went out. Through the silent streets she passed, through the empty market, and up the church steps she went, still carrying the flowers in her hand. "I will scatter them at the door," she said to herself, "as the people come into church they will tread on them. That is all they are fit for, to be under the feet of those who love GOD."

The bells rang on joyously and gloriously, calling the slothful and careless to meet their risen LORD. Amy raised the latch, and pushing open the heavy door, passed into the church. The scene that there met her gaze made her motionless with de-

¹ Cant. v. 2.

lighted wonder. All tokens of mourning had disappeared ; from end to end the great church blazed with innumerable lights ; the air was heavy with the perfume of flowers, twined in wreaths, and bound in bouquets ; font and screen, desk and pulpit, were bright with them. No wonder Julia could find no primroses in the market ; on all sides, in window, and niche, and capital, their blossoms shone like pale stars in dainty mossy settings. These were, possibly, the offerings of the poor or the little ones ; but who can describe the magnificence of the altar, gorgeous with the splendid offerings of the rich ? the altar-cloth stiff and heavy with embroidery and jewels, the massive candlesticks upon it wreathed with costliest flowers, the tall cross above it sparkling with gems ; and all around flowers which only the rich could procure, so lovely and rare were they, making beautiful the table of the King of kings.

A few worshippers only had as yet entered. Amy still stood at the door, wondering, admiring, thinking. The church was full of offerings, but there was no place for hers. She wondered whether the flowers on the altar were the gift of Julia's mother—whether Julia's little offering had been made in time, and, if so, whereabouts the happy child would find it. Then she looked down at the poor little bunch of wild flowers in her hand, how wretched they seemed, how utterly contemptible ; and she had so longed to give something, but she had wasted time and strength on that which was worth nothing.

She let the flowers fall upon the pavement, covered her face,

and wept bitterly. A hand upon her shoulder made her look up. The old grey-headed Priest of the church was standing by, watching her with pity in his eyes.

"What is the matter, my child?" he asked; "tell me your grief, and let me see if I can help you."

To tell her grief! that was what Amy wanted. She choked back her tears, and told him all her tale. He listened, deeply moved.

"Are those the flowers?" he said.

"Yes, Father."

"Gather them up, and give them to me, my child."

Amy obeyed wondering.

"My child," said the Priest, "no offering has any value in the sight of the LORD but such as it obtains from the love in the heart of the giver. Do you suppose that gold, and jewels, and costly flowers have in themselves any value in GOD'S sight? 'Has not Mine Hand made all these things, saith the LORD?' He looks not on the thing offered, but on the heart that offers it; the widow's mite may be far more precious to Him than the costliest jewels that ever shone in a king's crown. Trust me, my child, these flowers will be accepted. He accepts them by me, His Priest, and sends you by me, dear child, His Easter Blessing. Kneel down"—and Amy knelt; the Priest laid his hand upon her head, and blessed her fervently in the name of the LORD; then, taking the flowers, he bade her follow him, and walked up the church towards the altar.

"Is it possible that he is going to put them on the chancel screen, where the little lady hoped that hers might be?" thought Amy. "Oh no, that is impossible, it would be too great, too happy!"

Evidently they were not for the chancel screen, for the Priest passed through the chancel gates, and mounted the steps to the altar. Amy fell on her knees and watched him with breathless amazement. In the very centre of the gorgeous altar, at the very foot of the jewelled cross, conspicuous amongst the gifts of those who had given of their abundance, he laid the offering of her who had *nothing*. Happy, happy Amy!

Peal organ—peal, in thrilling notes, glad Easter Anthems through the spacious aisles. Pour your sweet incense, flowers of Easter-tide. Kneel, rich and poor, before that Altar Throne adorned by those to whom much has been given, but whose costliest gift is hers whose is that highest praise,—

"SHE HATH DONE WHAT SHE COULD."

For a minute or two after Sister Mabel's voice had ceased there was silence; then Lydia said suggestively, "Yes, Sister?"

Sister Mabel. "What?"

Rose. "Won't you go on, Sister dear? there'll be time to finish, I'm sure."

Harriet. "And this is just the most exciting part."

Sister Mabel. "'Go on,' my dears! Why, that is all!"

Chorus of astonishment and dismay. "All! the end! do you mean, Sister, that there is no more?"

Sister Mabel. "To be sure, that is all, that is the end—there is no more!"

Rose, indignantly. "Impossible!"

Lydia, imploringly. "Do just consider, Sister!"

Sister Mabel. "Consider what?"

Harriet, eagerly. "Why, that the Priest would never have let Amy go back to wander in the streets."

Charlotte. "Homeless and friendless!"

Chorus. "Impossible!"

Sister Mabel. "Well, you must settle the conclusion of the story amongst yourselves, for indeed my father never told me more than that."

Charlotte, pleadingly. "But make an end, then, Sister dear."

Sister Mabel. "Oh, Charlotte, I am too tired to *make* stories, or endings to stories, to-night!"

Miriam. "Poor Sister! but the end to this is so plain that it requires no making."

Chorus. "No, indeed!"

Sister Mabel, amused. "Tell it me, then; I should so like to hear it."

Lydia, eagerly. "Why, in the first place, after that good Old Priest had laid Amy's offering at the foot of the Cross—"

Harriet. "The Service would be about beginning."

Charlotte. "At least the people would be coming in."

Lydia. "Yes, and the Priest would show Amy where to place herself during the service."

Rose. "It would be somewhere where he could see her the whole time."

Lydia. "And as soon as ever the Service was over he would beckon her to him and take her home."

Miriam. "He would give her in charge to his housekeeper—I dare say he would have a housekeeper, or a cook, or something."

Rose. "And she would take Amy into the Priest's kitchen, and warm her by the fire and give her some—"

Harriet. "Bread and meat."

Miriam. "Hot broth."

Lydia. "Coffee."

Rose. "With sugar in it."

Lydia and Harriet. "Oh, certainly."

Rose. "And whilst she was taking it the housekeeper would rummage out of her stores some—"

Lydia. "Shoes and stockings—"

Miriam. "Warm clothes, and make her clean and comfortable."

Lydia. "And the Priest would keep her at his house till he could find some home for her."

Charlotte. "Here, for instance."

Lydia. "Yes, here."

Harriet. "Oh, how I wish there was really an Amy, and that she could come to us!"

"Hark!" exclaimed Miriam suddenly, holding up her finger for silence.

Each girl paused to listen, and in the hush was distinctly heard the sound of distant bells, rising and falling on the wind.

"They are the Kirkminster bells!" cried Rose.

Miriam ran to the window and opened it. The wind blew over Kirkminster bringing with it the sound of the Easter bells ringing in the "Queen of Days."

"They are ringing in the Festival! It is begun!" exclaimed Charlotte joyously. Miriam was all this time leaning out of the window listening in ecstasy to the musical peal.

At that moment the Home Chapel Bell began also to ring.

"The Festival is begun! 'The LORD is risen!'" cried Miriam, drawing in her head, and turning her glowing, joyous face towards her companions. And they, catching her enthusiasm, gave back with one voice the Easter response:—

"HE IS RISEN INDEED. ALLELUIA."

MIDSUMMER.





Midsummer Day.

MIDSUMMER Day! and such a day! not too hot, but tempered with a delightful summer breeze, and the sky flaked here and there with snowy clouds that hinted rain for the morrow; but who cared about the morrow? To-day was a holiday, and no rain would fall to-day.

And then what a prospect! when had such a mode of passing Midsummer Day ever been suggested at St. Mary's before?

Mr. Elsworthy had sent down word that on that day the hay would be carried in his meadows by the river between St. Mary's and Penfold Wood, and had invited the girls of St. Mary's to help in the haymaking and pic-nic for the day in those pleasant fields.

What a joyous procession was that which set forth—each girl carrying her rations for the day, and Sister Rachel and the nonitors bearing a kettle, and such like necessities, for their pic-nic feast. Why, the walk to the meadows was in itself a

holiday treat, as they wandered on leisurely by the pleasant little stream, through hazel copses, and willow beds, laughing, talking, and singing. And oh, what pleasant labour was that in the perfumed hay fields! Sister Mabel, sitting on a couch of hay, watched it with a smile of delighted satisfaction. The book she had brought with her lay open on her knees, but her eyes were fixed on that book of nature and happy childhood which lay stretched before her, and what book speaks more suggestively of the love and goodness of GOD?

The day went on : little by little the fields were cleared of their fragrant crops. The young haymakers had wandered in their labours a long way off. Their merry voices came softened by distance to Sister Mabel's ear. Sitting on her couch of hay, near the borders of the little stream, she fell into a pleasant reverie, from which she was at length roused by a noisy band of the younger children, who, having tired of their haymaking, now came to enjoy a good game of play in the newly cleared field. Gradually their numbers increased, and at last the whole band had gathered together, running, shrieking, and laughing, till at length, by common consent, they began to drop here and there on the grass, fanning themselves, complaining of the heat, and wishing it were time for tea.

Sister Rachel and one or two of the monitors were already preparing for this, and had started on an expedition to the neighbouring farm to forage for wood with which to boil their kettle. During their absence the younger children

gathered round Sister Mabel, and as some of the elder girls sauntered up, they heard this petition—

“Sister, do tell us little ones a story.”

To which the elder girls immediately responded, “Oh, pray do, Sister dear, but not a baby story, something that will do for us all.”

May. “But we little ones asked first, so it must be a nice little story for us.”

Lily. “A fairy story.”

Daisy. “Oh yes, a fairy tale!”

Rose. “By all means, a fairy tale; but Sister can surely tell a story that will do for all of us.”

Chorus. “You will, won’t you, Sister dear?”

Sister Mabel, smiling. “I will do my best.”

The word was passed with a joyous shout that Sister Mabel was going to tell a story, and a whole flight of girls settled down immediately round her, the younger ones calling the elders to witness that it was *their* story, told at their request—for them—and that it was on no account to be too “grown up.”

Rose. “What nonsense! as if it couldn’t do for us all.”

Sister Mabel. “Do not, pray, quarrel about it, or it will all go out of my head.”

At this alarming prospect a sudden silence fell on all, whilst Sister Mabel announced that her tale was called—

“THE THREE GOLDEN EGGS.”



MIDSUMMER EVE, OR THE THREE GOLDEN EGGS.

ONE hot summer's day three little girls were amusing themselves in a broad green meadow, at the bottom of which ran a river. They had run, and jumped, and frolicked, as you have been doing, till they were as hot and tired as you are now ; and then they sat down to rest and cool themselves on the bank by the river side.

At first they were very silent, being too hot and tired to talk, but, after a while, as they began to feel rested and refreshed they watched with interest the fish darting hither and thither, and sometimes leaping quite out of the water.

"How happy those little fish seem," said one of the girls whose name was Anna ; "I like to watch them so, I love to see things happy."

"They are very pretty," said the second, who was called Bella ; "their skins seem to flash all sorts of colours. How I should like to be a lady and wear a silk dress as bright and shining as those fishes."

"They look very fat," remarked Cora, the third ; "I should like to have a dish of them for supper."

The words had scarcely passed her lips when a large old fish that had been lying apparently motionless for some time in a little still pool under the bank, rose slowly to the surface. The three children watched him with interest ; but great was their astonishment when he opened his mouth and said—

Lily. "Oh, oh, oh, it is a real fairy tale ! how nice !"

A shout of laughter from some of the girls, and indignant remonstrances from others, greeted this excited parenthesis of Lily Dale, the youngest of all the girls.

Some. "Ha, ha, ha ! that's what the fish said, was it ? well done, Lily."

Others. "Be quiet, Lily, how can you interrupt Sister so ? how tiresome you are ! Go on, please, Sister."

Sister Mabel put her hand to her face and laughed. "Lily has put me out," she said. "I forget where I was."

"When he opened his mouth and said," exclaimed a chorus of girls—"now don't interrupt again, Lily !"

"No ; he did not say that," laughed Sister Mabel, "but—

"'Tis Midsummer Eve ; when the sun goes down look in the rushes under the great willow, and you will find three golden eggs. Let each girl take one ; and when she wishes for anything let her place it on the ground before her, and name her

wish. Whatever she wishes for that she shall have ; but after each wish the egg will get smaller, so let her beware how she wastes her opportunities."

This was a prodigious speech for a fish to make, was it not? The girls listened with the greatest astonishment. They thought they must have been dreaming, as the fine old fish sank slowly down again into his still deep hole.

"Do you think the fish really spoke?" asked Anna at length, under her breath.

"I think so," replied Bella, cautiously.

"Let us come back here at sundown," suggested Cora, "and look amongst the rushes under the willow; if we find the eggs there we shall know it's true."

The others assented, and as soon as the summer sun had fairly dipped beneath the horizon, the three girls with beating hearts approached the rushes under the great willows. A screech of delight burst from each, as Anna moved the rushes aside, and displayed to view three lovely golden eggs, about as big as those of a Bantam hen, lying together in a little mossy nest. They took them up almost with awe.

"Do you think it's true about them, what the fish said?" said Anna.

"Wish for something, and see," replied Bella and Cora.

"But I don't want anything just at present," said Anna; "so it would be wasting a wish. Don't you want anything?"

"No," replied they; which was not true, for each had settled

what she would wish for, only they both desired to express their wishes in private.

"Well, let's go home then," said Anna ; "the very first time we do want anything we shall know whether the fish has told us true or not."

Saying which she put her egg in her pocket, and ran off towards home, revolving in her mind on the way as she went the many things which it occurred to her she would wish for for her parents, brothers, and sisters, schoolfellows, and poorer neighbours. Curiously enough she never once thought of anything she would wish for herself.

The way home led through a wood. On a stile at the entrance sat a poor old woman, whom Anna recognized as the inhabitant of a small cottage in the wood. She had been out all day working and looked sadly weary. By her side lay a heavy faggot.

"Good evening, Goody," said Anna ; "are you going to carry that faggot home?"

"Yes, deary ; but it's most too heavy. I must have a bit of wood to boil my pot : not that I've much to put in it," she added sadly.

"I'll carry the faggot," said Anna, briskly ; and suiting the action to the word, she took it up, and ran off with it to the old woman's cottage. "Now I'll light the fire for Goody's supper whilst she's hobbling home," thought she ; and by the time the old woman had reached her door, there was a bright blaze, and

Anna was looking about for some materials of which a supper might be composed. "I can find nothing but this hard crust, and some pepper and salt in a screw of paper," said she to the mistress of the house.

"That's it, deary; that's just it," replied the old woman, feebly. "It makes a main good supper. I boil some water and pour it over the crust and let it stand till it's soft; then I put some pepper and salt to it, and that's 'spoon-meat.' Bless you, child, I've had nout but that for many a long day."

Anna's eyes filled with tears. "And you've been working hard all day!" she said.

"Ay, dear, but it's little as so old a body can do. It's but little I can earn, but for that I'm thankful. Here, let me put on the kettle and make the spoon-meat."

"But Goody, listen," said Anna, eagerly. "Wouldn't you like, to-night, just for a little treat you know, a nice little bit of hot mutton and greens and potatoes, and a nice pudding cake?"

"Oh, hush, child, it makes me hungry to hear you talk. Why I haven't had such a dinner as that this many a year—not since my poor boy died that used to work for me," said the old woman with a sigh.

"But you'd like it, wouldn't you, now?" said Anna persistently.

"Yes, yes, child, I'd like it well enough," replied old Goody rather fretfully. She was very tired and wanted her supper,

such as it was, sadly; she wished Anna would not ask such foolish questions, but get out of her way and let her boil her kettle.

"Ah, you would like it!" continued Anna, "and a big loaf of bread and a pat of fresh butter, and a little packet of tea. Then you'd have a good breakfast to-morrow, you know."

"There get out with you, child," said the old woman crossly, "you worrit me with your 'you'd like this, and you'd like that,' things won't come for my liking I reckon."

Anna vanished out of the door. The old woman thought she was offended, and was sorry for that, though glad to have the coast clear. She put on the kettle and then feebly dragged her faggot out of the back door to stow it away in her little wood lodge.

But a mighty purpose had formed itself in Anna's mind. Here was a splendid opportunity of testing the properties of the mysterious egg. She placed it on the ground before her, in the rays of the rising moon, and wished for all the good things she had enumerated to Goody, and a good jug of beer into the bargain. She was so nervous she scarcely dared look at the egg; but as the words of the last wish passed her lips she heard a little snap, like the discharge of a toy pistol—a thick white steam issued from and entirely concealed the egg from view, and when this cleared itself away there was the egg slightly diminished in size, but all around it were the mutton, the greens, the potatoes, the pudding cake, the bread, the

butter, the tea, the beer ! Anna clapped her hands and danced about in wild ecstasy. Then she darted back to the cottage to see what Goody was doing. The old woman was still struggling to get her faggot into the wood lodge. "I'll have all the things on the table before she comes back," thought Anna ; "what a surprise !" She trembled with excitement and joy as she carried her dainty supper into the bare kitchen, and arranged it carefully on the table. "Goody, Goody," she screamed when this was accomplished.

"Drat the child !" grumbled the old woman, "what a racket she do make to be sure ! Is the kettle boiling?" she added aloud.

"Oh yes, it boils," replied Anna, jumping up and down like a shuttlecock. "I'll put the faggot in the wood lodge—you come and eat the spoon-meat—it's quite ready, Goody."

The faggot was in the wood lodge in no time, and Anna, passing her arm round the old woman's waist, drew her eagerly towards the house. Poor Goody's astonishment when she saw what manner of "spoon-meat" had been provided for her can be better imagined than described. She hugged Anna and cried for thankfulness, and Anna hugged her and cried for joy.

But it was now growing late. So the happy child, leaving her old friend to enjoy her plentiful meal, set off at full speed homeward, and never stopped running till she came to her father's door.

"Late, Anna," said her mother reprovingly, as the little girl appeared breathless before her; "you know the rule—those who are out late have no supper."

"And we have had bread and treacle," observed Anna's youngest brother rather maliciously.

Anna's countenance fell for a moment; she was really hungry. But her smiles soon broke out again. "Ah, well I shan't starve before morning, Willy," she answered merrily, "and I suppose there's some treacle left for to-morrow. I'm sorry I'm late, mother dear," she added, kissing her.

"You're a good child," said her mother fondly, "but I can't break rules for you, Anna."

"No, no," replied Anna, "or Willy here would expect his bread and treacle kept for him."

So she went to bed hungry, but did not think about herself—only of her old friend in the wood. "It's uncomfortable to go to bed hungry," mused she, "and how hungry old Goody must be every night."

"Oh, why—" exclaimed Rose—but an indignant "hush—sh!" extinguished her.

"Why what, Rose?" asked Sister Mabel.

"Oh, why didn't she say what she'd been about, Sister?"

"That would have made no difference, she was late for supper, and so by her mother's rule she had to go fasting to bed; and a very good rule it was, I think."

"But if her mother had only known she'd have given her a double share of bread and treacle, I'm sure."

"Perhaps Anna did not care to be paid for a good deed with bread and treacle."

"But her mother would have praised her so if she'd only known!"

"Perhaps Anna thought her little act of love would have been spoilt as much by praise as by bread and treacle."

"Ay, in real life," assented Rose discontentedly: "but this is only a fairy tale."

Charlotte. "Well, people may do what's right in a fairy tale, I suppose, as well as in real life. *You* wouldn't go blabbing about any kind thing you'd done—you know that well enough, Rose."

"Perhaps not," said Rose, "but that's because one knows why, and this story is only——"

General Chorus. "Oh! never mind; what does it signify! Please go on, Sister."

Sister Mabel continued—

Having put Anna safely to bed we will now return to Bella and see what she did after Anna left her. She had already made up her mind as to what she would wish for out of her egg, and had resolved to be very prudent as to the number and value of the things she wished for, so as to make the egg last as long as possible.

The next day was Merrydale Fair. Bella and her sisters had

been looking forward to going to this fair for months; it was their one great pleasure during the year. But money had been scarce with their father, so their mother warned them that they must expect no new frocks, and very little for their fairings. Great had been their lamentations over this announcement, Bella's especially; "But now," thought she, "I can dress as I like, and be beholden to nobody."

When she reached home she found her sisters carefully ironing out their old ribbons and sighing over their twice turned gowns.

"They do look shabby, I don't deny," said their mother, "but they are not always the happiest or merriest who wear fine new gowns."

With this philosophy the girls were forced to be content. "If we could only have bought new ribbons, and just a bit of new trimming—this is so frayed—it would have been something, wouldn't it, Bella?" sighed one of them, as she folded up her faded things and laid them carefully aside.

Bella smiled superior, but vouchsafed no reply.

As soon as she could do so unobserved she retired to a little attic room, and, locking the door, placed her egg on the floor, and whispered her wishes with trembling eagerness. A shot-silk dress, an elegant mantle, a fashionable pair of boots, a hat and feather, primrose coloured gloves, and a fringed parasol.

As the white mist cleared away from her egg, as it had previously cleared from Anna's, there lay the things she had wished for, and Bella could scarcely believe her happiness. She turned

them over and over, and tried them all on by turns before a little looking glass about as big as a saucer. Then she put them carefully away, went down stairs to supper, and said nothing about them to anybody.

The next day was the great day of the Fair ; Bella's sisters took out the old things which they had cleaned and resuscitated with so much care and trouble ; still, very shabby they looked even in their own cottage, and they sighed to think how much more shabby they would appear when contrasted with the attire of their more fortunate neighbours.

And Bella's mother took out an old, old gown, which had been her holiday dress for many years ; " It will last my time," she said, " it don't signify much what an old woman wears." So she put it on quite contentedly. But when Bella appeared in her splendour, and quietly narrated her good fortune to her astonished family, there was a look of deep pain on the old woman's face, and her other daughters looked at each other and blushed for shame—ashamed, not of their shabby clothes, but of Bella.

However, nobody said a word, except—"You're in luck, lass ;" and the mother added, "You'd better take the big umbrella, Bella ; I think it'll rain before night, and it would be a pity those fine clothes should get spoilt."

"The big umbrella !" exclaimed Bella in disgust, "what, that great horrid cotton thing ! No, indeed, you may carry that yourself, if you like ; I've my fringed parasol."

"As you please," said Bella's mother, taking the "horrid cotton thing," and her sisters having armed themselves with another, the house door was locked and the whole party started for the fair.

Once there Bella's sisters found so many friends glad to see them, that they soon forgot that their dresses were not new, and enjoyed themselves heartily. Perhaps Bella enjoyed herself too, it is certain that she admired herself exceedingly.

But pleasant days come to an end at last, and so did this. "Surely it's going to rain," said Bella's mother, "there's a big drop! Put up your umbrella, girls; here, Sophy, you come under mine. Where's Bella?"

"She started home before us, mother, because she thought it looked stormy, and she'd only her parasol."

"Ah, well, perhaps she's home by this, if not she'll be wet to the skin. Hark! there's thunder."

A great storm had slowly rolled up, and was now gathering over their heads, and they were not yet halfway home. Down came the rain in torrents; but the umbrellas were large and strong, and they had nothing on that would spoil, so they were not particularly disconcerted. Dry shoes and stockings would be all they would need. But Bella? The storm broke over her before she could reach home, and in a few minutes her shot-silk dress was clinging tight to her, the green dye of her parasol had dripped over her hat and face; gloves, feathers, mantle, all were ruined, and when she had picked the key out

from its hiding-place under the eaves, and opened the door, sl darted in crying with vexation, and locked herself into th little attic to hide her miserable dragged finery from he sisters' eyes.

Here Sister Mabel was compelled to pause, the shouts of approbation from her hearers were so uproarious.

"Oh, serve her right ! not to give her sisters so much as a new bit of trimming !"

Exclamations such as these sounded on all sides ; but Mary Anne Foster seemed the most moved. Her honest face looked quite red and angry.

"Nasty hussy !" she exclaimed vehemently, "dressing herself up like that, and her own mother wanting a new gown !"

"Gently, gently," said Sister Mabel smiling ; but Mary Anne had not finished, "I'd have liked to have put her—silk gown, hat and feather and all,—into the water-butt, and left her there."

This poetic justice highly pleased her companions, but Rose suggested an amendment,—she would like to have made her wear her dragged clothes Sundays and weekdays, for the whole of the next twelvemonth. This punishment was also highly approved, and then Sister Mabel was called upon to proceed.

We must now go back to Cora. She has not had her first wish from her egg. When she reached home on that eventful evening, she found her mother looking anxious and worried.

“Edwy’s so poorly,” she observed to Cora as she entered, “the doctor says he ought to have just what he fancies to eat; he can’t eat what we have, he’s altogether off his feed. See here,” she added, “I cooked him this bit of meat, but he can’t stomach it. He wants something light and tasty, but how I’m to get that I don’t know.” And she sighed.

“Edwy’s very dainty,” replied Cora severely, looking disdainfully towards her tall over-grown brother, whose pale face and languid eyes were marked by the expression of weary pain.

“I am so parched,” he said, moistening his fevered lips, “I wish I had some fruit.”

“I can’t get any for you, deary,” said his mother, sadly; “we’ve none in our bit of a ’garden, and I’ve asked all round, but no one’s got any to sell.”

Cora, meanwhile, was impatient to get up stairs, to make trial of her magic egg; but poor sick Edwy was sitting with his back against the staircase door. “Do get up and let me pass, Edwy,” said she; “what ever do you sit there for, just in the way?”

“Because it’s comfortable,” said Edwy, fretfully.

“What are you worrying Edwy about, Cora?” asked her mother.

“Because he’s in the way; he never thinks of any one but himself,” replied Cora.

Poor Edwy got up sighing, and disposed of himself elsewhere, whilst Cora ran joyfully up stairs and locked herself into an empty room, feeling as Bella had done, that she would rather

have no witnesses of her experiment with her egg, or of her first wish.

In the room was a brown earthen pan about the size of a small washhand basin. She put her egg down by it, and wished that the pan might be filled with strawberries and cream. I need scarcely tell you that she had what she desired, and, as in her passage through the kitchen, she had filched a spoon off the dresser, she was enabled to feed herself with this dainty fare, and ate and ate, and gobbled and ate till she could really swallow no more. A very small quantity still remained at the bottom of the pan, about as much as would fill a saucer. She really could not eat this; what she had eaten was already beginning to make her feel very uncomfortable, so the generous idea occurred to her of giving it to Edwy.

She fetched a saucer, filled it with the remains of her feast, and took it to the sick boy.

"Oh, thank you, thank you, Cora!" he exclaimed, "how very kind of you! I have so longed for fruit,—and cream, too! how delicious!"

Her mother seemed as pleased as Edwy, and praised her greatly. Cora listened with much satisfaction, she really thought herself very good-natured indeed. But soon her feelings of self-approval were overpowered by a sensation of ever-increasing nausea.

"Nausea—what's that?" asked Lily Dale.

"She was getting sick, and a good thing too, the pig!" explained Lydia Lee. "Oh, that poor Edwy, her own brother!"

"And to think he should praise her for being kind!" ejaculated Mary Anne Foster: "but pray go on, Sister."

She became so bad at last that she was obliged to retire, leaving Edwy greatly concerned that Cora should be unwell.

In the course of the night her mother became alarmed, and sent for the doctor. He was not long in ascertaining her complaint, and, disgusted with the girl's greediness, he dosed her finely, and certainly took no pains whatever to make her medicines less nasty.

At this pause in the story great clapping of hands from the audience.

It was some days before she recovered the effects of that first wish. But each girl's first wish was a pretty fair sample of what the others would be.

Years passed on, and they grew from children into comely maidens. Anna's egg wasted gradually under the effects of her repeated wishes for something that would pleasure or advantage her parents, or brothers or sisters, companions, or poor neighbours, but, in all the years that had passed since the egg had come into her possession, not once had she wished anything out of it for herself.

Bella, again, was fast diminishing her egg by her ever-increas-

ing passion for dress quite unchecked by that unfortunate thunder-storm. As long as she could follow the fashions, and be envied by other girls for her showy and expensive attire, it was nothing to her that her father's coat was patched, and her mother's best gown twice turned, that one of her sisters caught cold because her shoes were so bad, and her brother missed a good situation because he was too shabby to take it.

And Cora, undeterred by fears of more nauseous drugs, pampered herself till her pretty face looked puffy and pasty, whilst the sick brother gradually faded away, his sufferings unalleviated by any pleasant dainty to tempt his diseased appetite ; and the father and mother never received from her any of those little offerings by which good children make their parents feel that their comfort is one of the first objects of their lives. So the girls each in her own way grew up to womanhood.

"Then now the little ones' share in the story is done," remarked Charlotte ; "the next part is for us big ones."

"But we're not going away," shouted the "little ones ;" "you listened to our part, so we'll listen to yours."

"Oh, listen and welcome," said Rose, "only don't interrupt, if you don't understand anything it can't be helped ; it isn't a baby story any longer."

"Oh, it hasn't been 'a baby story' at all," exclaimed Lily, "now has it, Sister ? nor are we babies, Rose."

"Well, never mind what you are, only hold your tongues."

"Gently, gently," again said Sister Mabel.

General chorus. "Please go on, Sister."

Sister Mabel proceeded.

At the time that the next chapter of my story opens, every maiden in the village where our three girls lived was looking forward to the May Day feast. The May Queen had already been named. Anna had been almost unanimously elected; and she could not help feeling a little elated, and a little anxious about her appearance on that occasion.

"I think I must have a new dress," said she to her mother.

"Well, yes, I think you must," was the reply; "I suppose the Queen must be a little smart, and that old white gown of yours is pretty nigh done for, I think."

Anna was glad her mother agreed with her, and for the first time since she had had her egg, determined upon wishing something out of it for herself, that is to say, a new white dress, and some blue ribbons with which she intended fastening up her hair. But first she produced from her egg, for her brothers and sisters, such things as she had heard them wishing for against the feast, also a new gown for her mother, and a new waistcoat for her father, leaving the fulfilment of her own wish till the last.

On the day before the fête her mother called her. "Anna," said she, "you know the cottage half-way up Nightingale hill; there's a poor widow there who has got her living mainly by

selling poultry, but I hear she's ill now, and wants to sell them off. Do you go and bargain for them. I should like them; they're a good breed."

Anna needed no second bidding, and set off at once.

It was a story-book May, (continued Sister Mabel, with a comical look in her eyes,) not like the Mays which we have now in these dull days, when fish do not lay golden eggs in holes under willow trees,—Mays of frost and sleet, east winds, and crooked tempers—it was a May as warm and balmy as June,—every flowering shrub and tree was in its glory; and all up the hill which Anna was now ascending the nightingales were calling and answering each other, trilling and warbling, and making such melody that, hearing them, the dullest heart must have been filled with gladness. And Anna's heart was not dull, so it fairly overflowed with happiness, and, when she stood before the poverty-stricken cottage, her bright presence there seemed to lighten it up with sunshine.

It wanted sunshine sorely, for it was a dismal place enough. Not that the May sun did not shine upon it, but then the brightness seemed only to bring out its poverty and squalor, and add to their depressing influence; whereas Anna's sunny face seemed to soften and gild it and shine right into the hearts which dwelt there.

On a poor-looking bed lay the widow, very ill and feeble, a good-looking boy sat by her, giving her drink from time to time out of a broken cup. The other children squatted, or wandered

about here and there with that tired wistful look which hungry children have. They looked at Anna sadly, but smiled a little when she smiled on them as she passed into the cottage.

It was not long before she had heard the widow's whole story. The house and garden plot were her own, and, till sickness had fallen upon her, she had earned a decent maintenance ; but during her long illness things had gone wrong, loss had followed upon loss, she was selling her chickens now because she could no longer afford to keep them. "I have sold my furniture bit by bit," she said, "to keep the children, as I could earn nothing for them, poor dears ! The house must go next, but it'll fetch but little, it's so sorely out of repair. And I had hoped to apprentice my boy—the best boy a mother ever had," she ejaculated in parenthesis, "he'd do well, I know, and soon make money for his mammy, but there—everything goes for the doctor, and I can earn nothing ! And I know I can't get well," she added, bursting into tears, "for I lie and fret and fret, so nothing does me good,—but it's hard not to fret when everything's going wrong, and one can't move a finger to help it."

Anna wept with sympathy, her heart was very full, and she fingered her egg in her pocket.

Presently the sick woman remembered the chickens. "Willy shall show them to you," she said. And Anna and Willy went out accordingly. But Anna was too full of other things to think of the chickens, and she did not even hear Willy's encomiums on his pets.

"Willy," she said, suddenly interrupting him in the midst of his praises of a fine Dorking cock, "if you could let this cottage, and get a cheap lodging for your mother in the village, the rent would go a long way towards keeping you."

Willy's face brightened, but presently darkened again. "No one would take it," he replied, "it wants so much doing to it, the water comes in through the roof in ever so many places."

"But if it could be repaired?"

"We've no money," said the boy, sadly. "If only I was prenticed," he added, sighing, "then I could keep mother, and the little ones."

"You think so?" said Anna, smiling.

"Oh, I would, I would indeed," exclaimed the boy, earnestly, "but mother don't know where to get the money."

All this time Anna was fingering her egg, and wondering whether enough of it remained to enable her to wish out of it anything so vast as the repairs of the cottage and Willy's prentice money. "I can but try," said she to herself. Then aloud to the boy: "I'll take that cock and those four hens; catch them and put them into a basket for me, and we'll carry them between us down to the village."

Willy ran to find a basket, and to catch the fowls, whilst Anna withdrew behind an outhouse, and, placing her egg on the ground, wished for the repairs of the house and Willy's prentice money. As the mist that arose from the egg cleared away, she

scarcely dared to look ; but there, oh, joy of joys ! lay a little heap of money, and raising her eyes to the cottage she saw a bran new roof, in which there was neither crack nor cranny by which a drop of rain could enter. But the egg, where was that ? It was gone ! It had come to an end at last ; this last great wish had fairly exhausted it ; so there was an end of all hope of a new dress for the Queen of May.

But what cared Anna, or who so happy as she ? what cared she for a new dress or blue ribbon when the widow kissed her hands, and Willy cried with joy ! To enjoy such happiness she would willingly have gone in darns and patches for all the rest of her life. She hastened back with her chickens to make preparations for getting the widow lodged in the village, letting the house, and binding Willy to his trade.

“ It is very nice of you, and good and kind,” said her mother, when she had heard her story, “ but what will you do for your new dress, my dear, now the egg is gone ? ”

“ I will go without,” replied Anna, gaily, “ there’ll be no great hardship in that.”

“ But you cannot be Queen in that shabby old gown,” urged her sister.

“ Then let Bella be Queen,” answered Anna.

“ She’ll be fine enough, you may be sure.”

And in fact the next day Bella was Queen in the gayest of dresses, procured from her egg ; but Anna danced none the less merrily, indeed it may be doubted whether any one enjoyed that

May Day feast as much as she did in her shabby old-fashioned gown, which, as Bella remarked compassionately, had actually pieces let in under the arms !

Bella herself, and her friend Cora, presented a striking contrast to the homely Anna. Their eggs had been severely taxed to furnish them with suitable dresses and ornaments, about which they were the more anxious as it was known that three well-to-do young men were to be present, all avowedly in search of wives. These young men's names were Robin, Strephon, and Timon.

Robin, a frank hearty fellow, seemed greatly attracted towards Anna, in spite of her shabby gown ; Strephon, who was dressed with considerable elegance, paid assiduous court to Bella, whom he pronounced the prettiest and best dressed girl on the green ; and Timon, after dancing with Cora, and discovering that she knew whereabouts the nicest dishes were placed in the supper tents, attached himself to her for the remainder of the festivities.

Not very long after that May Day feast three weddings took place in the village ; the happy pairs being Robin and Anna, Strephon and Bella, Timon and Cora.

Robin took his wife away to a pleasant little farm nestled amongst the hills. The widow, now completely recovered, sped them on their way with hearty blessings.

Strephon and Bella were to settle in the village ; and Bella was determined to see whether her egg could not be made to

produce a house suitable to their genteel pretensions. She took it out and looked at it ; it had diminished considerably. " I must not wish for anything costly," thought she ; " the egg can't produce much more." So after some consideration she wished for a house as large and grand as the egg could produce, and furniture to correspond.

Snap went the egg, up rose the mist, and there stood the house ! very smart indeed, with its stucco ornaments, and bright brass knocker, and green railings—all mighty genteel ! Certainly the walls looked rather thin, and the doors and windows were somewhat difficult to open and shut, but what did that signify ? its appearance was quite elegant—Bella was completely satisfied. And inside there were very smart tables and very smart chairs ; the former veneered and the latter very flimsy, still there they were ; and there were smart cheap curtains and carpets, and smart cheap ornaments in every room, all for show and nothing for use, but the effect was brilliant, and Bella was delighted.

But where was the egg ? it was gone !

Bella sighed ; then consoled herself with the reflection that the last wish had been so great a success ; and she issued invitations for a dance which was to inaugurate the new house and celebrate her wedding.

The neighbours all came. An elegant supper, singularly unsubstantial, but which made a great show, was laid in the lower rooms ; the dancing was to be above.

"Dear me, it's all very pretty indeed, my dear," said Bella's mother admiringly, "but I don't quite know where to sit down, I'm afraid the chairs won't bear me."

"Try the sofa, mother," suggested her husband, who also seemed doubtful about the chairs, and they planted themselves on the sofa accordingly.

The dancing began. "Mercy ! how the room shakes !" ejaculated the old woman ; and she was turning to communicate her fears to her next neighbour, who was seated on one of the doubtful chairs, when crash went the sofa, down went the old lady and her husband, and falling against the neighbour, the doubtful chair gave a lurch, snap went a leg, and the neighbour rolled over with her friends on to the floor.

This unfortunate incident caused some confusion, and the dancing was temporarily suspended, but when the frightened old people had been picked up and comforted, and the damages to chair and sofa had been repaired with string, so that they "looked," and doubtless were, "as good as ever," the dancing began once more.

The evening was now pretty well advanced, and the first instalment of guests were refreshing themselves in the supper room, when they were aware of pieces of plaister falling from the ceiling into their plates. They looked up in consternation. A yawning crack appeared over their heads. Crash came the chandelier on to the table ; the shrieks of the terrified dancers were heard, and their legs seen protruding through the hole.

The party was thus literally broken up, the guests fled in terror, and Bella sat and wept amidst the ruins.

Meanwhile Cora had contented herself with wishing out of her egg a wedding feast of the most substantial and luxurious description. Timon approved of this so highly that during the whole time of their honey-moon the egg was severely taxed for dainties, and grew continually smaller and smaller, till it was scarcely bigger than a hazel nut.

At length Cora's constitution, already undermined by self-indulgence, gave way, and one night, lying in considerable suffering, she sought relief from her egg. Placing it on the table, she wished for something to do her good. The egg snapped, and when the mist cleared away there stood a box of pills and a bottle of medicine. But where was the egg? It was gone at last, and nothing remained to Cora but the pills and the mixture.

At this period of the story Sister Rachel came up to say that the kettle was boiling and the tea prepared. Sister Mabel's audience broke up laughing and chattering, and expressing their supreme satisfaction at the discomfiture of Bella and Cora.

For a full hour after this, the importance and delight of a gipsy tea engrossed all thoughts, but when it was ended, and everything made ready for the portorage homewards, some of the elder girls petitioned Sister Mabel to continue her tale.

Most of the "little ones"—the extreme heat of the day being past—went off to play "drop handkerchief." "The story was grown up now," they said. But for that very reason the elder ones wanted some more of it.

"Tell us some more about Bella and Cora, dear Sister," they pleaded.

"Indeed I cannot," replied she, "their history—as regards their eggs—is quite concluded."

"Well, just a little more about Anna, then ; it is so cosy here in the hay, dear Sister."

"Well, let me see if I can think of anything more about Anna." Sister Mabel reflected a few minutes plaiting mechanically some stalks of grass, and then continued,—

For some years everything was bright and prosperous with Anna. Her husband was kind and good, and her children grew up loving and beloved around her. But at length sorrow came. Her husband died. Her sons were too young to be of any assistance to her. Her farm was mismanaged, her money failed ; distress came upon her, and ruin stared her in the face.

"Oh, Sister," exclaimed several voices, "that is not fair ! you should not afflict poor Anna so."

But Sister Mabel was quite obdurate. She would not abate one misfortune to the favourite heroine. On the contrary she rather aggravated them.

Compelled to leave her pretty home, she sought refuge with her three daughters, Dinah, Ella, and Flora, and her two sons, Urban and Vincent, on the edge of a desolate moor. The winter set in, and how they were to struggle through it Anna scarcely knew. They did struggle on, however, till the end of January. February brought with it wild storms, an empty larder, exhausted resources, and heavy hearts.

"Don't you wish you had your egg back again now, mother?" asked her eldest girl one day,—a pretty bright-eyed maiden of eighteen or thereabouts.

But Anna thought of the joy that egg had brought to a widow's home, and said, "No, Dinah, no; if we had it now the good it would bring us would have been purchased by the sorrow of others; I would not have it back."

Dinah sighed. "How the storm is rising! Hark, mother, how it is howling across the moor. What a night for travellers."

"It is so cold," said Ella, the second girl, kneeling down by her mother: "mayn't we make up the fire, mother? it is nearly out."

"No, deary," replied Anna, "we will go to bed and warm ourselves there; we have but one faggot left, and we must be careful of it."

Just then in came Urban her eldest boy.

"Mother, the moor is covered with snow, it is a fearful night. I have brought up the cow and stabled her, and given her some

hay; but there's only enough for one day more. If this weather lasts, what are we to do?"

Anna sighed.

"Mother, I am so hungry," said little Vincent.

"Cut the child a piece of bread, Dinah dear," said Anna sadly, "and give him a little milk; but be sparing, love, the cow is almost dry, and we've come to our last loaf."

Dinah obeyed; and Anna taking Vincent on her lap tried to soothe his hungry impatience whilst his scanty meal was being prepared.

"Hark!" exclaimed Ella presently, "surely there's some one knocking at the door. Look out of the window, Flora, and see if anybody is there."

Flora, a golden-haired child of eight, pressed her head eagerly against the window. "There is no one," she said, "there is nothing, only the storm."

They were silent, and the gusts of the howling tempest struck against the lonely cottage as if it would break it down, it howled, and roared, and bellowed like an evil beast ravening for its prey. In a pause, however, they distinctly heard that some one indeed was knocking at the door.

"Open, open!" cried Anna; "Open, Urban, my boy; it is some traveller belated on the moor, no one should be abroad such a night as this."

Urban threw open the door. A man stood on the threshold, holding a horse by the bridle. He looked faint and half

frozen. "Can you give me and my horse shelter for the night?" said he.

"Surely, sir," replied Anna. "Walk in, walk in. Urban, take the horse to the stable, there's room for him and the cow; rub him down, make him comfortable, and give him some hay, poor thing."

"Not the hay, mother," whispered Urban, "there's scarce enough for the cow."

"Yes, give him the hay," replied Anna, "the poor beast is quite spent." And Urban wondering led the horse away.

Meanwhile the traveller cowered over the miserable fire, and tried to warm his benumbed limbs. "Can you mend the fire?" he asked presently, "I feel as if I had no life in me."

"Fetch the faggot, Dinah," said Anna hastily.

"It is the last," whispered the girl.

"Never mind, the man is perishing with cold, we must shift as we can," replied her mother.

The faggot was brought, and soon a cheerful blaze leapt and sparkled up the chimney. "I am so faint," said the traveller. "I lost my way, and have been riding all day without food. Can you give me a morsel of anything?"

"Nothing but bread and milk, sir," said the widow.

"If you will heat me the milk, I ask nothing better," replied the man with half-famished eagerness.

"It is the last loaf," whispered Ella.

"And there's but very little milk," murmured Flora.

But Anna poured the milk into a saucepan to warm, and proceeded to cut up her last loaf.

Warmed and fed the traveller revived. He thanked his hostess heartily, and finally lay down to rest on a comfortable couch which she made for him close to the still burning embers.

He woke the next morning strong and brisk, and, raising himself on his elbow to look about him and recall his still wandering ideas, saw Urban bending over the remains of last night's fire.

"What are you doing, my man?"

"Seeing if there's enough wood left to make up a fire."

"Why don't you fetch another faggot?"

"This was our last," said Urban.

The traveller started up.

"Will this bread and milk be enough for your breakfast, sir?" asked Urban. "The cow is well-nigh dry, and we haven't another loaf in the house."

"Ay, ay, that's enough, and more than enough," replied the traveller hastily. "But what are you all going to have for breakfast yourselves?"

"I don't know, we must make shift somehow," said the boy.

The stranger stroked his beard, stared at Urban, and said nothing. He was a fine-looking man, with large dark thoughtful eyes, and a kind face; his appearance and dress were those of a gentleman.

"Where's my horse?" said he presently; "I must see to him."

"Oh, he's all right," said Urban; "I've given him a feed, and he's as well as can be."

"Ah, you're a ready little groom, and a smart boy! Where's your mother?"

"She's not up yet. She's afraid of waking the little ones. It's no use their waking, there's nothing for them to eat."

Again the stranger stroked his beard, and stared at Urban.
"And your mother is a widow?"

"Yes." He might have been mistaken, but Urban thought he saw tears in the stranger's large dark eyes.

"Is there any place near here where one could get a faggot?"

"Oh, yes; there are farms on the moor."

"And something to eat and drink?"

"Oh, yes, for money; but then we have no money," said Urban. And he sighed.

"Have you a big marketing basket?"

"Yes."

"Can you ride?"

"Oh, yes," and Urban smiled.

"Then look here: I have money, mount my horse and ride. Order in a good stock of faggots, and bring back in the basket bread, eggs, bacon,—anything it will hold. Your mother gave me a good supper last night, you and I will spread her a comfortable breakfast this morning."

Urban could scarcely believe his ears. By the gentleman's

desire he fetched the basket and followed him into the stable. The horse whinnied with pleasure at sight of his master.

"Ah, you have fared well, Deerfoot," said the traveller patting him. "Is that all the hay you have left?" he added to Urban.

"Yes, sir."

"But what will your cow do?"

"She must make shift somehow. The horse was quite spent, and mother said it must be fed."

The stranger said not another word, but saddled Deerfoot, and helped Urban to mount.

The storm had quite ceased, the morning was still and calm, the clouds were all gone, and the sky smiled overhead. Deerfoot was gentle and willing, and Urban was not long about his errand.

He found the stranger awaiting him impatiently at the door. "Quick, quick, before your mother comes down," he said, "I hear her moving, and the little ones asking for breakfast. I have lighted the fire with the remains of last night's wood; but where are the faggots to feed it?"

"Here," said Urban, as a man drew up in a light cart, with a nice little cargo of wood.

Urban left the man to house it, and seizing one faggot rushed into the house. Such a splendid blaze was soon roaring and crackling on the hearth, Deerfoot looked in at the door approvingly, and the stranger laid the table.

When Urban returned from putting the horse back in the stable, he found his mother and her children assembled in the kitchen, gazing at the wonderful preparation before them with amazement and delight.

The children did not need much pressing to partake of that plentiful meal, but Anna could scarcely eat for tears of joy. The stranger soothed her gently, and had soon drawn from her the tale of all her sorrows since her husband's death. He listened very earnestly, asking many questions, and his manner grew increasingly tender, and almost reverential.

There were many lamentations when at last he rose to go. "I am still far from my journey's end," said he smiling, "but when the days are long and warm, I will come again, never fear."

He kissed the widow's hand, pressed those of Dinah and her sisters, stroked the boys' heads, mounted Deerfoot, and rode off like the wind.

That was a day of wonders. Before nightfall there was hay enough in the stable to last the cow a year, a woodstack in the yard, and the larder filled to overflowing. No one knew whence these good things came. The people who brought them said they had been ordered and paid for, and that was all they knew. The widow and her children guessed; and looked with increasing desire for the long warm days which were to bring back the welcome stranger. The comforts which they traced to him made living easy till May came back with all her joys, and wealth of buds and blossoms. The days were now warm, the

evenings long, and Anna and her children looked anxiously over the moor to see if their friend were returning.

And he came at last, one sunbright morning, when, as it chanced, they were not looking out for him. Not on Deerfoot this time, but in a carriage, in which he begged his friends to place themselves ; he would take them for a drive, he said.

"Not before you have taken something," exclaimed Anna and Dinah ; "we have still some of your good things left. Come in and see, and let us thank you."

He had breakfasted, and it was too early to eat anything more, he replied ; they would dine together after their drive. So with much laughter and merriment they locked up the cottage, entered the carriage, and he drove them away. In a very short time they had quite passed the barren moor, and then entered a beautiful country, and passed amongst fields, and homesteads, and orchards bright with blossoms.

"Do you know this country?" asked the gentleman at last of Anna, as he got down and let his horses walk up the hill. They had all been talking so much, asking and answering questions, that she had taken no special note of the objects around her. It now struck her that they must have come a long way. Twice had the stranger stopped to bait and water his horses, and as Anna looked around at his question, as to whether she *knew* the country, she was aware that it was drawing towards evening, that the sun was already going down, and that they were not making a round and returning to the moor as she had supposed.

She felt a little anxious. "Are not we a long way from home? had we not better get back, if we can, before dark?" said she, answering his question by another.

"Possibly, but not to the moor," he replied. "But tell me, do you know this country?"

Anna looked round again. They were ascending a steep hill; on either side the road were woods and thickets from which multitudes of nightingales poured their delicious songs.

"I could have declared," said she, "that this was Nightingale Hill!"

The stranger smiled. The sun drew nearer the west, and a flood of golden glory filled the heavens and earth. The woods swept back, there was a clearing here near the top of the hill, and there, in the clearing, stood a cottage covered with roses and creepers to the very roof; its garden blazed with flowers, and the hum from the row of bee-hives on its southern side made pleasant music.

The stranger drew up his horses, and giving the reins to his servant, helped Anna to alight. He led her into the garden, her children followed, admiring everything, but wondering why they had stopped.

"Do you know this cottage?" the stranger asked: he was holding Anna's hands, and looking earnestly into her eyes.

Her voice faltered. "It is very beautiful,—it is much altered,—but I think it is one that once belonged to a poor widow whom I knew."

"And do you not know me?"

Anna looked at him wonderingly and shook her head.

"Am I not Willibald, that widow's son?" exclaimed the stranger passionately. "Do not I owe everything I possess in the world to you,—to your sweet bounty? Was it not through you that I was placed in a position to earn an honourable independence?—through you that my mother lived to see her son's success, and then died in peace and plenty?—through you that I have been enabled to do the same by my brothers and sisters that you once did for me? And is not their house your own—your very own—and am I not now your son, the dearest object of whose life shall be to make you happy?"

He caught her in his arms and covered her face with kisses. Anna felt faint with joy and surprise, and lay motionless for awhile in his embrace with her head upon his shoulder. The children looked on in mute astonishment.

"And you are really my little Willie?" said she at length, smiling through her tears.

"Your own Willie, your very own!" he answered, kissing her again. "But now come and take possession of your cottage."

Everything that the most thoughtful love could provide was there for the widow's comfort. Anna went from room to room as in a dream, Dinah following thoughtfully. When they had seen everything inside and outside the house, they "all dined together after their drive," as Willibald had said they should.

There is little more to be told. Willibald sought closer ties

to bind him to this second mother, to whom he had owed his fortune and, since then, his life. One cloudless Midsummer Day, when all the woods were melody, and all the air was sweetness, such a gay wedding was seen in that place as the village had never before witnessed. The bridegroom was Willibald, the widow's son, and the bride was Dinah, the Widow's daughter.

And in that cottage, and all around it, from that day forth was sunshine,—warm sunshine,—ceaseless sunshine,—even when others said they found the days both cold and grey.

The story was ended ; for a few moments there was silence, then came the chorus,—“Thank you, dear Sister, we like it very much.”

“Yes,” said Rose, “it is very pretty ; I’m so glad Anna was happy at last. But then you see,” she added critically, “all but the eggs might have happened really, so it’s scarcely a fairy tale.”



MICHAELMAS.



Michaelmas Day.

SCENE : ST. MARY'S SCHOOLROOM :—BEVY OF GIRLS ALL
TALKING AT ONCE :—ENTER SISTER MABEL.

Miriam. "Oh, Sister"—

Rose. "Such a beautiful sight"—

Charlotte. "Miss Elsworthy looked so lovely with"—

Lydia. "Such a number of carriages, and all the coachmen
had enormous"—

Mary Anne. "Bridesmaids dressed in blue and white, with
long veils and"—

Rose. "Twenty boys and girls from the Kirkminster
school"—

Lydia. "Loads of ladies so splendidly dressed"—

Mary Anne. "Walking two and two"—

Rose. "Strewed the bride and bridegroom with"—

Charlotte. "Such a beautiful peal of bells"—

Miriam. "And then the crowds all down the streets, we could hardly"—

Mary Anne. "Get into Mr. Elsworthy's carriage with"—

Rose. "The Kirkminster band playing"—

Lydia. "The Bishop who married them"—

Chorus. "Ha, ha, ha ! Sister Mabel is stopping her ears ; she has not heard one word."

Sister Mabel. "On the contrary, my dears, I heard a great deal—that—for instance—each coachman had an enormous bridesmaid,—that the newly-married pair were strewn with bells,—and that you rode in Mr. Elsworthy's carriage with the Kirkminster band playing a tune I never heard of before, called, 'The Bishop who married them !'"

The girls laughed heartily.

Rose. "Oh, Sister, that was because we all talked at once ; now, let us begin one at a time, and tell you all about it."

It was a beautiful cloudless Michaelmas day. That morning the eldest daughter of Mr. Elsworthy,—a kind friend and patron of St. Mary's,—had been married in Kirkminster church ; and the Monitors of St. Mary's Orphanage had been especially invited by Mrs. Elsworthy to come to the church to see the wedding, and afterwards to dine in a tent with Mr. Elsworthy's tenants in his beautiful park at Highfield.

No wonder there was much to tell ; much confusion—from

delighted eagerness—in telling it ; much difficulty on the part of Sister Mabel in understanding it. One thing, however, was manifest enough—the girls had been not only much delighted by their day's holiday, but, also deeply impressed by the solemn Marriage Service seen and heard by them that day for the first time. The elder girls had passed their childhood, they were already—

“ Standing with reluctant feet,
Where the brook and river meet ;”

one or two in a few days—one or two in a few weeks—were to leave the Orphanage,—the home of their childhood, and begin the battle of life in the great world beyond.

They had been looking forward to this for some time, partly with pleasurable anticipation, partly with dread. Some of my elder readers as are not “ at such a distance from their youth in age” as to forget their sensations, when, at fifteen or sixteen, they stood on the verge of womanhood looking forward to it with pride and exultation, can doubtless recall more or less vividly, the day-dream of *marriage*, which, however diverse might be their other hopes, plans, and expectations, formed the fixed centre round which all other dreams arrayed themselves.

Does there exist a girl already arrived at the borderland of sixteen who entertains neither openly, nor secretly, thoughts and hopes of marriage ? Does there exist a young girl who is not inwardly convinced that marriage is her ultimate destiny ?

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Miriam. "And then the crowds all down the streets, we could hardly"—

Mary Anne. "Get into Mr. Elsworthy's carriage with"—

Rose. "The Kirkminster band playing"—

Lydia. "The Bishop who married them"—

Chorus. "Ha, ha, ha ! Sister Mabel is stopping her ears ; she has not heard one word."

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There may be such, but I believe they are very rare. They did not exist among the monitors of St. Mary's, and no one was better acquainted with this fact than Sister Mabel.

She knew it was natural for girls of sixteen or so to think about marriage ; she knew it was natural for them to talk about it,—and as it was her invariable rule not to attempt to check and thwart nature, but simply to guide and direct it, she never frowned down, or branded as evil, these natural thoughts and words, but merely endeavoured to give them that seriousness and reality which girl's day-dreams so often lack.

Well aware that private chatterings amongst themselves on this subject might be most mischievous and unwholesome, she had laid down these rules for her girls :—

I. "Never say anything to one another which you would be *ashamed* for me to overhear.

II. "Say anything you like to me as freely as you please. If what you say is wrong—or better left unsaid—I will tell you so."

And she never discouraged them when their chatter on this subject was directed to her, but let them say their say, and did her best to awaken in their young minds a sense of the tremendous responsibility of marriage, its inviolable sanctity, its sacrifices, and its duties. Sometimes her lessons were couched in serious, reverent, words, and drawn from Holy Scripture and the lives of Saints ; sometimes—but with the same end in view—she would point them with a merry tale, or droll anecdote,

according as the humour of her children varied, and the frame of mind in which she happened at the time to find them.

Manifestly on this bright Michaelmas Day fun and frolic were in the ascendant, and the girls' minds overfull, perhaps, of bridal dresses, and bridal gifts, wedding bells, and wedding breakfasts, and though but a feeble reflex of these could ever fall to their share, yet a superabundant gabble ensued upon the delight of choosing a wedding gown, and sitting down to a wedding feast however humble.

And then the delights of housekeeping afterwards !

Somebody started that idea, and a good deal was said about it, while Sister Mabel, sitting quietly by with her work, listened with a half-amused expression of face, doing nothing to check the flow of words beyond now and then interposing a quaint suggestion, or mildly satirical criticism.

Michaelmas Day was an invariable half-holiday at St. Mary's, and as invariably spent in a long afternoon walk to the beautiful Penfold woods, which lay some two and a half miles off, and abounded in nuts and blackberries.

On this present occasion all the children, except the monitors, had started on their usual expedition, and the latter now found themselves somewhat at a loss to fill up the remaining hours of their holiday in a manner quite satisfactory to themselves. Going to see the wedding had been charming indeed, but now their thoughts travelled longingly to Penfold and its woods.

They had got out their "recreation work ;" but as needle-

work was the regular order of the day every afternoon at ordinary times, it was suggested by Rose, and seconded by Harriet, that working in the school-room was too much "like every day." Charlotte proposed a general adjournment to the great tree at the bottom of the play-ground, and this being carried by general acclamation, a migration took place ; Sister Mabel accompanying them.

Seated in the rich golden glow of a September sun their spirits continued to rise and their tongues to clatter—but the theme of their discourse, however it might vary, was always connected, more or less, with the events of the morning. At length Charlotte, with much emphasis, laid down this opinion, which was at once endorsed by all her companions,—that to be absolute mistress of a house of one's own, and to be the one object of a husband's attention and care, must be the happiest and most fortunate lot on earth.

"You might think so, perhaps," said Sister Mabel, "but I doubt the happiness of the 'husband,' or the good fortune of yourself."

Charlotte. "Indeed, Sister, why?"

Sister Mabel. "A woman intent on being absolute mistress of her own house—and the one object of her husband's attention and care would be, I think, a singularly disagreeable person—and if she succeeded in being what she aimed at, would find her success the reverse of good fortune. She would become arbitrary and obstinate, or jealous and exacting, or fretful

and peevish, or passionate and quarrelsome—or all these put together. I should not like to be the husband.”

The girls laughed.

“You have been talking a good deal of harmless twaddle,” she continued, “about your wedding dresses and such like, but you have all of you overlooked the one thing absolutely necessary for the bride to bring to her husband’s home, infinitely more necessary than wedding clothes, or wedding furniture.”

Chorus. “Indeed, Sister, what is that?”

Sister Mabel. “‘The ornament of a meek and quiet spirit, which is in the sight of the LORD of great price.’ A *meek*, forbearing self-control in all the duties of her new life, a *quiet* unvarying trust and confidence in the man with whom she is one in CHRIST—these are the essentials of marriage, my girls, these are the only charms which will enable a young woman to make a married life that happy lot which every young untried girl imagines it to be.”

The girls looked grave. They did not in the least doubt Sister Mabel, but they were not in a humour for any very grave remarks or serious reflections that day; and Rose expressed the general desire when she said, after a slight pause, —“How I wish, Sister, you would tell us just this once, as there are only us big ones here, a downright grown-up story—not about children at all, but about love and marriage.”

General Chorus. “Oh do, Sister!”

Sister Mabel smiled and shook her head. "I have forgotten all my fairy tales," said she.

Miriam. "Fairies! oh, we don't care about fairies, Sister, never mind them."

Charlotte. "I like fairies."

Rose and Lydia. "So do I."

Harriet. "Let us have a fairy, Sister."

Lydia. "And, sister, may the man in the story be a blacksmith? The man, I mean, that is to be in love with the woman in the story, and marry her."

Ever faithful to the memory of her brother Mark, the young blacksmith, whose death by an accident had left her doubly orphaned, Lydia's interest in the hero of any tale depended a good deal on his following her brother's calling. The girls all knew this and smiled.

"A blacksmith and a fairy—ah!" mused Sister Mabel. There certainly did not seem much affinity between them.

"You will tell us a story of that kind, won't you, Sister?" said Rose persuasively.

"Well, well, but just give me time to think," replied the Sister, looking lovingly on the fair young faces from which she was so soon to be parted, and then away into the sunbright West where all the landscape floated in golden glory.

She doubted her success exceedingly in a "love story," but there are enemies against which one may be warned even by a seemingly idle tale. In certain times and moods, minds—

especially young minds—will receive wisdom very kindly if disguised in motley, but will turn from him if he appears in the garb of a preacher. ●

So after a little pause, she said, "Well, girls, I will do my best; I will try to remember, and piece together, an old tale that was told me when I was as young as you are. The hero shall be a blacksmith, to please Lydia; and as the story is called 'The Salamander,' there will, of course, be a fairy in it."

Harriet. "A 'Salamander,' Sister, what is that?"

Charlotte. "I know—it's an iron used for browning bread crumbs over mince."

The girls looked astonished, and Sister Mabel laughed.

"I saw Mrs. Davis down at the Chaplain's house using one," pursued Charlotte, "when I took the shirts home. She put the mince into the dish, and a quantity of bread-crumbs over it, and then she held a hot iron over the bread crumbs and browned them; and she told me the iron was called a 'Salamander.'"

Chorus of astonished inquiry. "But what can such an iron have to do with a fairy?"

"With a domestic fairy a good deal, I've no doubt," said Sister Mabel, still laughing; "and mine is to be a domestic story, remember, and with a blacksmith in it too! However, I will confess that Mrs. Davis's Salamander and my Salamander are quite different things. Hers, as Charlotte informs you, is a hot iron for browning bread crumbs, and mine is a beautiful

fairy that was supposed—when people believed in fairies—to live in the fire."

Some. "A beautiful fairy! delightful!"

Others. "In the fire! how odd!"

Sister Mabel. "Oh, you don't half know about fairies yet, I see. So I must explain to you that some were supposed to live in the air, and these were fairies proper, or elves; and some under the earth, these were gnomes; and some in the water, these were naiads or nixies; and some in the fire, these were salamanders. So each element had its fairies—earth, the gnomes; air, the elves; water, naiads or nixies; fire, the salamanders. To think that I should remember all this in my old age!" added the Sister, as she paused to thread her needle.

Rose, enthusiastically. "Delightful!"

Lydia. "And as salamanders lived in the fire, and blacksmiths have forges, of course this salamander will have something to do with the blacksmith."

Sister Mabel. "Oh, certainly."

The only person apparently unsatisfied was Miriam. "I hope the fairy won't make a baby story of it," said she.

Sister Mabel. "Everybody shall be quite grown up in it, Miriam."

Miriam. "Ah, Sister, but so they are in 'Cinderella' and 'Beauty and the Beast,' but those are only nursery tales for all that."

“Well, let me tell *my* tale,” remonstrated the Sister, “and you shall criticize it afterwards.”

“Yes, yes,” cried the others, “go on, Sister dear ; we’re sure to like it.”

“Very well,” said the Sister, “then listen. My story, as I told you before, is called

THE SALAMANDER.”



THE SALAMANDER.

THE pretty village of Apeldorf, the scene of this authentic and romantic history, was situated in the beautiful valley of Perrivale. Part on the banks of a swift clear river which ran through the valley ; part scrambling up the mountains which rose from the plain.

The people of Apeldorf were simple folk ; none of them very rich, none of them very poor ; but happy and contented, industrious and gay. Those that were better off helped those who were less fortunate. They all worked with a will, and amused themselves with a will, and were all of them as merry as the day was long.

Shut in by the mountains which surrounded their lovely valley they knew nothing of any town save one, and that only by report. This was the tolerably large and prosperous city of Grandeville, lying miles away beyond the mountains, and though known but dimly to the Apeldorfians through the

reports of some of their travelled fellow-villagers, a type to them of all that was large, magnificent, opulent, dangerous, and desperately wicked.

The Grandevilleins, if report was to be trusted, sometimes quarrelled, and even fought ; sometimes ate too much, or drank too much ; sometimes took what was not their own. But the Apeldorfians did none of these things. If they differed, they agreed to do so ; they left off eating when they had eaten enough ; they ceased to drink when they had drunk enough, and if they ever took what was not their own it was not till they had obtained the owner's permission. So no wonder they were shocked at what they heard of the doings of the Grandevilleins, though this did not hinder them from admiring them very much, and thinking every one and everything that came from Grandeville wonderful, admirable, and immeasurably superior to anybody or anything to be found in Apeldorf.

Now the occasions which led to any intercourse between the inhabitants of the little village and the great town were few ; but from time to time it happened that a levy of men was raised in Apeldorf to swell the contingents of the Grandeville army, and such of these warriors as returned to their homes generally arrived with enlarged ideas, damaged morals, and a store of marvellous tales and anecdotes, to the delight, scandal, and unbounded admiration of their untravelled neighbours.

On the evening on which my story begins there was a goodly

gathering in the spacious kitchen of Marto the blacksmith of Apeldorf—

Lydia, interrupting with delight. “ Oh, the blacksmith !”

—to keep his fiftieth birthday.

Lydia, groaning. “ Oh !”

Marto the blacksmith was a very important person in Apeldorf, and looked up to as one of the richest and wisest members of the little community. Open handed and sociable he loved to gather his neighbours round his hospitable board ; his birthday, especially, was always looked upon as a village festival ; and since his two daughters, Agnes and Lisa, had grown to womanhood these gatherings were not likely to be discontinued, or to decrease in rustic splendour and merriment.

Agnes and Lisa were merry, light-hearted girls, but not at all perfect in tempers or feature. Agnes was freckled and had a wide mouth ; Lisa, though fresh-coloured and blooming, was spoiled by a turn-up nose ; and the tempers of both had been lately shaken out of joint by the arrival of Nannette, a niece of their mother's, who, left an orphan and heiress by a well-to-do cutler of Grandeville, had been, according to the terms of his will, placed under the protection of her Aunt Joan, and her aunt's husband, Marto the blacksmith.

Previous to Nannette's arrival Agnes and Lisa had been looked upon as quite little fortunes in their way, but their pre-

tensions were now utterly extinguished by the splendid Grandeville demoiselle with her airs and graces, her Grandeville fashions, and her money-bags, so carefully guarded for her by her uncle the blacksmith.

She sat now like a little queen at the upper end of the large room which served for banqueting hall, ball room, and kitchen in one, surrounded by a little court of admiring and half-envious girls, who surveyed and examined with respectful curiosity the young heiress's blue bodice, edged and laced with silver, silver chain and bracelets, and the ribbons in her beautiful fair hair. That she was very lovely there could not be a doubt. Her brow was delicately fair, her eyes as blue as her bodice, her features regular and finely formed, her neck and arms beautifully shaped and of dazzling whiteness; and that she was an heiress every one knew. Still these charms and this fact did not seem to have produced any adequate effect on the youths of Apeldorf, who, already assembled, crowded together at the lower end of the room, gazing on the beauty, and—as she thought—admiring her, but really criticizing her, and that not sparingly. Midway between the youths and maidens Dame Joan, the blacksmith's wife, assisted by her daughters, was busily arranging the birthday feast.

"Miss Nannette looks wondrous proud to-night," observed Tonio the miller; "shall any of us dare ask her to dance do you think?"

"Samson will, he 'dares' anything," observed a young man

on whose shoulder Tonio was resting his chin as he contemplated the proud beauty.

"Not I," replied Samson hastily. "Give me a good-humoured lass that can smile and look kind, I care nothing for your fine Grandeville ladies, however beautiful they may be."

"She will dance with none of us to-night, you'll see," continued the first speaker. "She will reserve herself for young Bernard."

"All girls from Grandeville are not fine," remarked another; "there's Tonio's sister Blanche as simple as a lily, though she has lived half her life in Grandeville."

But Tonio did not like his sister to be talked about by his companions, even in commendation, (as no good brother does,) and hastened to divert the conversation from her. "I don't think so much of Nannette's beauty, after all," said he; "her eyes look hard and cold, one cannot fancy them looking pityingly on man, woman, or child—it is not a face that one would care to see bending over one's bed if one were sick. And a face that is not kind can never be lovely."

"Oh, for the matter of that," replied Samson, "there's a face that is not 'kind,' yet it is twice as handsome as Nannette's." He pointed as he spoke to a young girl at that moment engaged in sweeping up the hearth. His companions all laughed.

"What, little Mab the spit-fire?" said Tonio. "Ha, ha, she looks indeed as if the hot coals had fallen out of her eyes and mouth."

"Or rather," added Samson, smiling grimly at his own joke, "as if she had sprung from them. Does she not look every inch a Salamander as she gropes over the fire?"

"So, after all," interrupted Rose, "the Salamander is only a girl, not a fairy!"

"And the Blacksmith is fifty years old, and has two grown-up daughters!" added Lydia.

"Never mind, so much the better," exclaimed the rest, "we didn't want a baby fairy tale; and what can it signify whether the blacksmith is old or young?"

"But I thought he was to fall in love with somebody and marry her," objected Lydia; "how can he when he is fifty years old, and has two grown-up daughters?"

"Patience, patience," said Sister Mabel smiling, "the story is scarcely begun yet, and will never get on if you interrupt it."

All except Rose and Lydia. "Hu—sh—sh—sh!"

Sister Mabel continued.

As Samson spoke the girl looked up, as if she had a dim consciousness of being a subject of remark; her eyes met his, and the fierce fiery glance which she darted scornfully on the whole group seemed to justify his observation. She was a small, delicately made young girl, with a really pretty face disfigured with sullenness, and large black eyes flashing with angry scorn; her magnificent black hair was twisted up roughly

and untidily, her dress was dirty and torn. Bending now over the fire, and apparently grovelling in the ashes, she might well pass for some creature in affinity with heat and flame. This was Amabel—commonly called Mab—the orphan child of a destitute kinswoman of Marto the blacksmith. The good-natured man had adopted the friendless girl, and made her welcome to his hospitable roof; but the girl's fierce temper, alienated most people from her, and when Dame Joan, bluntly saying that every one should work for what they eat, set Mab to household tasks, she performed them grudgingly and negligently, sighing for an affection she never tried to gain, and disfiguring her pretty person by neglect and untidiness.

She had now just finished sweeping up the hearth, when Dame Joan bustling up ordered her out of the way. "How long Marto is coming up from the forge," said the busy housewife, "the supper will be spoilt if he and Bernard do not make haste; depend upon it they are chatting together. When once Marto and Bernard begin talking there's no knowing when they'll leave off. Ah, what a joy to have Bernard back again! Never was son more welcome home to his own parents than Bernard is to us. When he set off with his wallet on his back to join the army at Grandeville, his own father—Marto's old partner—did not grieve more than Marto himself. When the war broke out, and we knew Bernard was in the thick of it, his own father didn't fret more about him than we did. And now old Antony's dead, and Bernard has no father to come back to

- but Marto, but we'll give him a son's welcome home, so that he shan't feel his pain of losing his father over again."

"Is he going to be Master Marto's partner, Dame?" asked Tonio, "and settle down regularly amongst us?"

"Surely," replied Dame Joan, "and let us pray no fresh wars may break out to take our young men from us. If it did all you lazy fellows would be called out, but I doubt whether you'd any of you be as good soldiers as Bernard was, or be so gladly welcomed home again."

The young men looked sheepish, and were relieved when an inner door opened and the blacksmith entered in his holiday suit followed by the young man they had been discussing.

"A young blacksmith—do you see, Lydia?" said Rose laughing. "Now I suppose you are satisfied, especially as Dame Joan said he was so much better than every one else."

Lydia laughed, nodded, but merely said, "Please go on, dear Sister, I like this very much."

Sister Mabel continued.

In short the present festivities had a twofold object, partly to celebrate Marto's birthday and partly to welcome home from military service the afore-mentioned Bernard, son of Marto's former partner Anthony. His return had caused a much greater sensation among friends and neighbours than that of other warlike and adventurous Apeldorians, partly because his

high character and many good qualities had endeared him to all who knew him, and partly because he was the only Apeldorfian who, for many years, had been lucky enough, or unlucky enough, to have been actually in an engagement—who had taken part in real marches after real enemies, and had dealt hard blows, and received hard blows, to and from the same. No wonder Bernard the blacksmith found himself on his return not only warmly and affectionately received by former friends, but fêted and admired by all the neighbours as a hero—not exactly of “a hundred fights”—but certainly of one or two, to say nothing of perilous marches and countermarches, and all the miseries and discomforts of warrior life.

Now, as he entered the room, a burst of applause greeted him ; eager hands were stretched to grasp his, and for a little while a general Babel of welcome prevailed, and nobody thought of the supper—except Dame Joan indeed. She loved Bernard dearly, and intended him for the son-in-law who was to make either Agnes or Lisa happy ; but much as she cared for him she cared just then still more for the supper which had cost her so much thought and care. So after Bernard the hero had been introduced to Nannette the heiress, a proceeding which but for her cares as hostess Dame Joan would have watched with some misgiving, she raised her voice lustily above the tumult, and desiring each lad to choose his lass, announced that supper was ready. Every one being very hungry her summons was speedily obeyed. Samson appropriated Agnes ;

Tonio, Lisa ; and Nannette by common consent was given to Bernard.

The beauty was very condescending to the hero, but was disconcerted to find that he seemed strangely unaware of his rare good fortune, and took all her compliments and civilities pleasantly enough, but apparently as a matter of course.

At first every one was too hungry to talk much, but when supper was half ended merry voices began to buzz, and then for the first time Marto noticed that Mab was not present. In answer to his inquiries Dame Joan said that if Mab, knowing the supper was ready, did not choose to come for it, she had much better go without. Marto, however, insisted that Mab should be called, and causing a seat to be placed by his side for his little kinswoman, sent Agnes, sorely against her will, to fetch her.

Mab, meanwhile, in her own little room, was kneeling at her open window, her smutty face flushed with anger, her fierce eyes red with crying, her tangled hair falling in wild disorder over her shabby dress as she rested her elbows on the window-sill, and her chin on her hands, and listened to the merry sounds below. The bright Michaelmas moon, the soft tints of the mountains, the warble of a little bird which still believed it was summer had no power to soothe her troubled, angry spirit.

"They must have nearly done supper now, but no one has ever asked for me, or thought of me, not even Cousin Marto." It was the thought of his forgetfulness which had made her

eyes red with weeping. "And yet I can love him, or any one else that is kind to me, better than such poor shallow fools as Agnes and Lisa, or that odious Nannette—how I hate her!"

This unamiable sentiment had scarcely crossed her mind when she heard Agnes calling to her sharply—"Mab, Mab, why don't you come down! How tiresome you are; here father has sent me to fetch you, and won't finish his supper till you come."

Mab's first impulse was to refuse rudely to join the supper-party; but the proof that Cousin Marto had really thought of her and cared for her softened the angry girl, and she answered, though somewhat sulkily, that she would come. Agnes rushed back to continue her merry chat with Samson, and Mab proceeded to array herself.

She shook out and carefully combed and braided her magnificent silky hair. Generally she grumbled at its length and luxuriousness, but now she took pains with, and felt a pleasure in, the rich dark masses, as Cousin Marto had once admired them. When her hair was dressed and her smutty face washed clean she took out of a chest her only holiday dress—a black stuff bodice without any trimming and a scarlet skirt that had once been Cousin Joan's. Mab looked at, and handled them, with manifest aversion, and proceeded to put them on with a look of disgust.

"How hideous they are, how perfectly odious! but of course no one cares how I am dressed!" she muttered; but just then

Cousin Marto's stentorian voice was heard shouting to her to come down immediately, and, afraid to linger, she finished her simple toilet as quickly as possible, and hastened down stairs.

As she entered there was a sudden hush, only broken by ill-disguised titters. Mab's face burned with painful blushes as she made her way to the vacant seat by the side of Cousin Marto. As she passed up the room, Samson whispered to Agnes—"I said before supper that your cousin looked like a Salamander, but she is more like one than ever now in that red petticoat."

"A Salamander in a red petticoat! Oh, how excellent!" exclaimed Agnes, quite enchanted with Samson's wit.

"What is that? What's the joke?" shouted Marto.

The simile was handed to him down the table. The honest blacksmith roared with laughter. "A Salamander! why, so she is—'In a red petticoat,' ha! ha! Why, child, it puts my eyes out; but never mind; sit thee down and eat, and don't spit fire at any one if thou canst help it."

Mab obeyed as far as sitting down was concerned, but as to eating that was impossible. She felt herself choking and sinking with angry shame. Nannette was among the loudest of laughers. "A Salamander in a red petticoat! What an excellent description of Mab. Don't you think so?" she added, turning to Bernard, who was intently considering the young girl with a look of curiosity and surprise.

"Very good, indeed," he replied, gravely, and was somewhat silent till supper was over.

When this was ended every hand assisted in clearing the table, and preparing the room for dancing, and then the real fun of the evening began. Mab quietly but sulkily assisted Dame Joan in her housewifely duties, and when her services were no longer required, turned into an inner room, designed for the use of the elders of the party, but now deserted, and seating herself on the ground by the side of the hearth, watched, with dreamy eyes, the red flame leaping up and down upon the log which had been thrown upon it.

Presently a voice beside her made her start. "What are you watching so earnestly? That merry Salamander in a red petticoat dancing so gaily there?"

Mab looked up scowling. Bernard, the blacksmith, had drawn a stool to her side, and had seated himself upon it.

"Samson called you a Salamander, and you did not seem to like it. Why not?" continued he.

Mab vouchsafed no answer. "Do you know what a Salamander is?"

"A devil," said Mab, fiercely.

"A devil! no such thing. At least not necessarily. The Salamander is a beautiful spirit that lives in the fire and brings warmth and gladness wherever she goes."

The fierceness died out of Mab's eyes.

"Sometimes the Salamander lives in the sunbeams, and looks

into poor cottages, and makes them warm and bright ; or peeps into prisons, and cheers up the prisoners ; or shines into sick rooms, and makes even the dying glad. And sometimes she dwells in the fire on the hearth, and who can live without her ? Old and young, rich and poor, busy and idle, all love their merry, laughing, dancing Salamander."

Mab looked amused and pleased.

"To rich and poor she is equally necessary, but even more so to the poor man than to the rich. She stands him in stead of luxuries—comforts, or even food. We soldiers could never have got on without her, I can tell you. When, after a long march, worn out, half-starved, and wet through, the halt was at length sounded, our first care was to light our camp fires and invoke the merry Salamanders ; and when they answered our call, and we saw them dancing in their gay red petticoats, up and down, over and under our faggots and logs, we forgot we were cold and tired and hungry, and lay down and slept contentedly."

Mab looked up in his face and laughed.

"And what would the blacksmith do without the cheery useful Salamander ? She sits in his forge, and works with him, and for him, and makes even ugly grimy things look bright and pleasant. As a blacksmith I'm bound to sing the Salamander's praises."

"Sister," said Miriam, suddenly, "in what country was all this supposed to happen ?"

Sister Mabel lifted her hands deprecatingly. "In what country! Now, Miriam, what an unfair question! Who ever fixes the geography of a fairy tale? In what country did Cinderella live, or Beauty and her Beast, or Blue Beard?"

"Ah, but this sounds in some things a more real story than those. I wish it was supposed to be in England, but it is impossible it could have been here."

"Quite impossible!" said Sister Mabel with emphasis.

"Still 'Perrivale' sounds like an English name," continued Miriam, who was a pupil teacher and well up in geography.

"I am afraid the names of the places and people in the story will help you but little in fixing the locality," said Sister Mabel, laughing. "Even if 'Perrivale' has an English sound, 'Apeldorf' might pass for corrupt German. Ah, now I think of it," continued the Sister, "'Apeldorf' must certainly have been situated somewhere in Germany (Germany is a large place, you know, Miriam), for, on serious reflection, I am convinced that only in Germany could a blacksmith have been found who talked poetry."

Miriam was going to ask "why?" but her companions stopped her. They were perfectly indifferent as to the nationality of Bernard and Mab, though much interested in their history.

So Rose having earnestly assured Miriam that "it did not signify two pins" in what part of the world Apeldorf was situated, at the girls' united request Sister Mabel proceeded—

At the blacksmith's last words Mab looked away blushing into the fire, and there beheld a very curious sight. Standing on the summit of the log was a small and singularly beautiful figure, dressed in a black bodice and flame-coloured petticoat, which flickered to and fro like fire ; her hair and eyes were black, but who could describe the beauty of the latter ? Their expression varied as often as the flame-coloured petticoat flickered. Sometimes they melted with tenderness and pity, sometimes they sparkled with fun and frolic, sometimes they kindled with courage and high resolve. Mab fixed hers in wrapt amazement on the beautiful apparition—Bernard—the room—all faded from her view. She seemed alone with the Salamander ; she ceased to hear the music and the dancing ; no sound met her ear but the crackling of the log, and a sweet soft voice that sang—

“The daughters of Fire, we gladden and cheer
Both places and hearts that are dismal and drear,
We purify, fortify, cherish, and tend,
We comfort, we nourish, revive and defend ;
We work with the busy, we laugh with the gay,
The long night of sorrow we spirit away.
The gay Salamanders, the daughters of Fire,
No coldness can chill us, no labour can tire.”

As the song continued Mab felt a warm glow at her heart such as she had never before experienced, and, casting her eyes downwards, she discovered that her despised red skirt was flickering also, like living flame, and it appeared to her that she was seated

on a log in the midst of a wide open hearth. A light smoke rose from the embers round her, and presently blotted every object from her view. She could no longer see either the Salamander or her own skirt, or the log on which she seemed to be sitting.

Just then Bernard's voice sounded again in her ear, "Salamanders love dancing, will you not dance with me?" She started; the Salamander was gone; she looked at her skirt,—it was as ugly and commonplace as ever; she sat on the ground, and not on a burning log; by the side of a hearth, and not upon it; the fiddlers were fiddling wildly, the sound of the dancers was louder than ever, and Bernard spoke again—"Salamanders love dancing, will you not dance with me?"

She did not answer, but arose as in a dream, and presently Nannette, Agnes, and Lisa, were astonished by the sight of the girl they so despised flying down the dance as lightly as a fairy, with glowing cheeks, and laughing eyes, to the amazement of all, and the admiration of Cousin Marto.

That evening was an era in the life of little Mab. The warmth which the song of the Salamander had kindled in her heart never left her. There was a light in her eyes and a glow on her cheek no one had ever seen there before. Every one was astonished at her beauty. Her sluggish, slovenly habits were all laid aside. Her dress might be ugly, but it was scrupulously neat. Her raven tresses shone like bands of silk. Quick of hand and nimble of foot, she got through more work

in a day, than Agnes and Lisa together could do in two. Cousin Joan was pleased and astonished, Cousin Marto was delighted and proud. Now wherever Mab went she met a smile. No more sneers, no more snubs, no more scoldings ; no one called her "spitfire" any more, but Bernard and many others called her "Salamander," a name which now always called up a happy smile or merry laugh.

"Is this the same world I lived in before?" thought little Mab. "Why am I now so happy?"

She asked herself this question one night as she sat leaning over the fire. "It is because your heart has learnt to love those about you," a clear small voice answered distinctly from the dancing flame, but though she heard the voice, she did not this time see the Salamander.

But if Mab's life had grown bright since that memorable evening when she heard the Salamander's song, what a glory fell around it when Bernard asked her one day if she would not be *his* Salamander, to warm his hearth, to brighten his home, to lighten his cares, to enhance his joys,—the warm bright spirit which should chase all gloom and sadness from his heart, and make his whole life perpetual youth and gladness.

She was humbled by the very excess of her joy. The ill-concealed mortification of Agnes and Lisa, Nannette's affectation of haughty indifference, Cousin Marto's surprise, and Cousin Joan's evident disappointment made her shrink at the thought of her own unworthiness.

"What can he have seen in me?—why should he have chosen me?" she questioned in her heart. "Oh, it must be because I love him so; I can love better than they, and love must make a Paradise wherever it dwells."

"Or a desert," said a voice from the fire. Mab started. There on the log sat the Salamander whom she had seen on Marto's birthday.

"Mab, mark my features well," said the spirit, "should you recognise me if you saw me again?"

"Oh, yes," murmured the girl. She thought it impossible she should ever forget the gentle loving eyes, the smiling lips, the softly rounded cheeks, the silky shadowing hair. The Salamander smiled and faded from her view.

"'Or a desert!'" said Mab to herself, repeating the fairy's words. "How can love make a desert?"

"By being ill-regulated, wild, and selfish," replied the voice from the flame.

Mab pondered the answer deeply, and satisfied herself that her love could never be either ill-regulated, wild, or selfish. Was it not humble, gentle, and devoted? it could never injure, but must always bless the object on which it was bestowed.

It was now winter, but the wedding was not to take place till the summer, to give Bernard time to build himself a cottage on the mountain side. Amabel and he had chosen the spot with care. A beautiful natural platform overlooking the valley, and partly shaded by the boughs of a magnificent walnut-tree.

Every day little Amabel walked to the place to see how the work was getting on, and dream sweet dreams of future happiness under the walnut-tree. At last the frost became too hard for building work to proceed ; the cottage came to a standstill, and Mab's walks turned to the forge, where she would stand for an hour together watching the showers of sparks that fell under the heavy strokes of the blacksmith's hammers.

One evening, as thus she stood by the forge, turning her eyes from the bar of hot metal which Marto was welding, to the fire which Bernard was blowing up to a flame, she suddenly beheld the fairy. The little creature reclined on the hot embers much at her ease, and smiled on Amabel. The girl glanced hastily at Bernard's face to see if he was aware of this strange visitor, but there was nothing there to show that he was conscious of any addition to the party.

"Do you not see her?" she whispered at last.

"Who?"

"The Salamander."

"O, yes, I see her," replied Bernard smiling and looking into Mab's eyes.

"No, but I mean really, do you not see her in the fire?"

"In the fire, and in everything else that is pleasant, and useful, and loveable," replied Bernard gallantly, still looking on Mab's eager face. But in spite of these compliments Mab felt provoked, she pouted and frowned. At the same moment an extraordinary change came over the Salamander. Her flame-

coloured petticoat twisted and writhed like a fiery snake, a malignant scowl disfigured her once lovely face, her black hair raised itself hideously above her brow, her features contracted with rage, and she crouched in the embers like an evil demon.

Fascinated with horror Mab stared with open eyes at the frightful metamorphosis. Marto spoke to her, and Bernard touched her, but she neither heard nor felt. At last with an effort she tore herself away, and fled with terror from the forge. The snow had fallen heavily, she sank into it at every step, and when at length she reached home she was wet through, chilled and trembling.

Cousin Joan made her change her clothes, and would then have drawn her to the fire, but Mab shrank back into the farthest corner. She feared to see that distorted face looking at her again out of the pleasant blaze.

"Better starve with cold, and die of discomfort," said she to herself, and so she sat shivering and trembling till Bernard's return. Then in answer to his anxious inquiries she whispered in his ear what had terrified her. He listened with surprise, but made no comment. Fortified by his presence, Mab at length left her corner and joined the rest at supper, and after supper sat with them round the fire, though she could not help glancing fearfully every now and then at the blazing logs, half expecting to see that evil face grinning at her.

No face however appeared, and Mab had wellnigh forgotten

her terrors, when shouts were heard without, rapidly approaching. All started to their feet. Now the cries were distinguishable :—
“Marto—Bernard—Fire—Fire.” The door was burst open, and two or three men hot and breathless rushed in shouting—
“Quick to the forge—the forge is on fire !” Marto and Bernard were off like lightning, the women remained trembling behind. “I will go, I must go,” exclaimed Mab seizing her cloak and hood, and before any one could stop her she had darted out into the darkness.

She saw the flames, and heard their roaring above the shouts of the men, long before she reached the forge. It was a frightful spectacle. The fire raged furiously in the still winter’s night, the long fiery tongues licking round the eaves, and darting through the roof. The water was frozen, what was to be done? Mab looked on in terror, and presently shrieked aloud, as the figure of the Salamander rose through the flames, with which her red skirt blended ; her wild hair floated upwards like a cloud of smoke, her eyes gleamed with savage fury, but through all the horrid distortion of the repulsive countenance Mab recognised the same face which had once smiled so sweetly on her from the hearth.

And then another resemblance struck her ; her heart almost stood still with horror ; whether Bernard saw the Salamander,—whether he recognised what *she* recognised, Mab could not tell, but his voice rang in her ears in a tone she never forgot,—
“Down with her, stifle her, smother her with snow.”

And the men laughing and shouting, hurled huge masses of snow into the flames. Mab's eyes never moved from the Salamander's face. As the snow fell round her the fury in her eyes turned to wild alarm, and then to sullen despair. Then a grey shade passed over her brow, her eyes grew dim, her head drooped, an expression of despairing grief dwelt on every feature, and with a longing, craving glance as if imploring a mercy she did not hope to find, she sank as one dying into the still blazing forge.

Of course the forge was burnt to the ground, and when all was over the neighbours wiped their foreheads, condoled with Marto and Bernard, and speculated on the origin of the disaster. "But what is this?" said one of them hastily, starting back from a dark object he had just descried upon the ground. "A woman dead or fainting!" All crowded around. Bernard raised her in his arms. It was Mab! Full of terror and unable to account for her presence there at all, he carried her home at full speed. When at length she recovered her senses, her looks were wandering, and her speech was wild.

"I saw her, Bernard," she exclaimed, "I saw her again."

"Who? What, my child?"

"The Salamander. It was the same face I had seen on our hearth, the same that frightened me to-day at the forge. Bernard, Bernard, *it was my own!*"

For some days the shock Mab's nerves had sustained kept her weak and depressed, but time softened the impression she

had received ; Bernard's love sustained and comforted her, and at last she felt strong enough, and brave enough, to walk by herself to the forge and survey the scene of the disaster.

There lay the forge a mass of charred ruins, and over the spot where Mab had seen the Salamander fall was a heap of snow. As she stood gazing upon it she seemed again to hear Bernard's voice crying "Down with her,—stifle her,—smother her with snow," and to see again the despairing look of the Salamander, and that craving, mute appeal for mercy in her dim eyes before she fell. Mab's tears fell fast. The face had been *her* face. Would that fate be hers? Would Bernard's love die out, and would Mab's heart wither and die under the snow of cold indifference or aversion heaped on it by a husband's hand?

"Oh, that the winter were over!" she cried ; "I long for warmth and sunshine."

The sunshine came back at last and brought spring with it, and Mab's hopes and spirits revived. As spring passed into summer her wedding day drew near. Disappointed as Dame Joan was that Bernard was not her son-in-law, she yet did her best to fit out the young bride with a proper wedding trousseau, and assist Bernard in his beginnings of housekeeping.

The cottage on the mountain was finished. It appeared to Mab an abode fitted for perpetual bliss. Once more a sense of her great happiness overpowered every other feeling. She was more than ever gentle and subdued, and almost sad under the

shadow of her blessedness. She noticed neither Agnes and Lisa's coldness, nor Nannette's covert sneers. As time passed on and the marriage day approached more and more nearly, she was too much absorbed in her own thoughts to notice anything around her.

Weeks diminished to days,—days shrank to hours,—the wedding day had dawned.

Amabel had risen before it was light, and sitting at the open casement watched for the first ray of the rising sun. "How cold and grey the world looks now without the sunbeams! Such is life without love," said she. "Love and sunshine make a Paradise wherever they fall."

The first sunbeam gilded the horizon, and seemed to pass straight onwards to Amabel's little room, and rested on her heart.

"Love and sunshine make paradise wherever they fall," said Amabel again.

"Or a desert," answered a soft voice from the sunbeam. It grew in intensity, it filled the room, it fell like a glory round the astonished girl. And then in its brightness she discerned a figure clad in dazzling white; its eyes were blue, its locks were golden, but the face was the same, though softer still and sweeter still than that which had smiled to her from the hearth on Marto's birthday. She recognized the Salamander.

"Or a desert!" whispered Mab, "how can that be? When can love and sunbeams bring anything but gladness?"

"When they are selfish and all-absorbing," answered the Spirit. "Come with me." She took the girl by the hand, and they seemed to float upward on the morning mist. "Look down," said the Spirit, and Amabel looked down. She saw a region parched and burnt as if a flame had scorched it. Animals, birds, and insects hid from the horrid glare. Mab saw the labourer drop at his work, she saw anguish and suffering on the faces of the few men who dared to stir abroad. "Anything better than this," they gasped, "better loss, poverty, ruin." And as they shrank away, seeking shelter from the savage heat, Mab saw the scorching beam assume a human shape—the figure of the same Salamander she had seen in the morning ray. But what a change was here! The blue eyes were fierce and pitiless, the delicate mouth deformed by bitter sneers, the sweet face white with anger, the golden hair had changed to fiery snakes. And, a thing of horror though it was, still the face was the face of the once lovely Salamander, and in its cruel ferocity Mab again recognized a likeness to herself. She cried aloud with terror—the vision faded from her eyes. Once more she found herself in her own little room. Her wedding dress lay on the bed, the early birds were singing their morning hymns of praise. Amabel looked about her, and tried to shake off her fear. She busied herself with little preparations for the coming day. Presently she was aware that though the sun was still but just passing above the horizon, yet that her little room was filled with golden light. Fairy-like

music fell upon her ear, and as she listened, entranced with delight, she distinctly heard these words :

“The Sun’s golden daughters, we enter and cheer
All places and hearts that are gloomy and drear ;
We purify, fortify, cherish, and tend,
We comfort, we nourish, revive and defend ;
Bring hope to the wretched, and strength to the weak,
To the broken in heart of bright futures we speak ;
The Sun’s Salamanders, the daughters of light,
We bring life and gladness, and love and delight.”

As the sound died away the Salamander stood once more before her. Mab at first shrank back with dread, but a second glance reassured her. No angel could have been more exquisitely fair ; the sweet face beamed with tenderest love, the blue eyes melted with sympathy, the little hands were stretched out to embrace, the delicate mouth slightly pouted for a kiss, and bright wings, which sprang from the Salamander’s shoulders, formed over her a canopy of radiant light, from which showers of liquid sunshine seemed perpetually falling.

Amabel approached with awe and admiration, the little gentle hand took hold of hers, the sweet lips touched her brow, the shower of sunshine fell all over her. A feeling of rest, and joy, and tranquil happiness pervaded all her being.

“Amabel,” said the Salamander, “one thing is wanting to

thy wedding dress—thou hast no bridal wreath. For another hour the house will be at rest, follow me out into the early morning rays, and I will teach thee to twine such a wreath as shall bind thy husband's heart to thee for ever."

Amabel followed her wondering down the stairs and out into the little garden, which drenched with morning dew still lay in shadow. "Gather every flower on which the sunshine falls from my wings," said the Spirit; "all those, but *only* those."

The girl obeyed, gleaning after the Salamander the blossoms on which the sunny drops had fallen, and on which they rested, even after she had gathered them, so that each flower became a thing of light. When her hands were full the Salamander took the flowers from her. She seemed to steep them in the shower of glory which kept dropping from her, and as she did so such perfume arose as mortals had never perceived in flowers before. Then, bidding Mab sit down, she threw them one by one into her lap.

"Here is a myrtle, that is maiden's love; here a clove pink, a woman's true devotion; the violet, that is modesty; white violets, truth and candour; camomile, that is patience; the heartsease, sweet contentment; orange flowers, pure wifely love; and a white rose, that's *silence*. Twine them with these," she added, and plucked from her head a few golden hairs, each thread of which was sunshine. "Now mark my words," she continued, whilst Mab began to weave the flowers together; "when thou art married, hang this garland over the hearth.

The flowers are charmed, they cannot die unless thou killest them. As long as they retain their freshness and perfume, so long will last thy married happiness ; but should they fade, thy joys will perish too. Examine them every night, look to them every morning. Should they ever seem to droop, tears only can revive them. But observe, no one but thou can make them wither, no power but thine can kill them."

"But how, how?" asked Mab anxiously; "sweet Salamander, how can I injure them?"

"Unloving thoughts will make them droop, unloving words and deeds will kill them."

"Then can they never droop with me," cried Mab, eagerly; "my thoughts, and words, and deeds can never be unloving."

The sun was up now over the hill top, his beams fell full on Mab, at first with a delicious warmth, but presently with a scorching heat so unlike the soft rays of morning that they made her feel faint and sick. She looked up in pain and discomfort, and caught the Salamander's eyes fixed upon her with the pitiless savage glare she had seen once before that morning. The mouth had again grown hard and cruel, the face was livid with rage, her wings, her hair writhed and twisted like fiery serpents. With a cry of terror Mab started up, and let the wreath fall from her lap.

The sun's rays ceased to smite her, the Salamander faded from her view, a light breeze sprang up and fanned her hot cheeks and brow. Mab thought she had been dreaming, but

there she stood in Cousin Marto's garden, and the bridal wreath lay at her feet.

I need not dwell on the wedding of Bernard and Amabel. It would seem very tame and commonplace, I am sure, after Miss Elsworthy's grand wedding this morning. I will only say that no one, not even Bernard himself, seemed to observe anything peculiar in Mab's wedding garland. Had you asked Agnes and Lisa the next day of what it had been composed, they would have told you that it was a simple crown of myrtle, such as were worn by all the village brides in that country.

"A certain proof," observed Sister Mabel, interrupting herself, "that all these events must certainly have happened somewhere in Germany, Miriam, for German wedding wreaths are, I believe, made of myrtle."

"Now Miriam must be satisfied," laughed Rose. "Pray go on, Sister."

Another remarkable circumstance about the wreath was, that although Mab had hung it, according to the Salamander's directions, over the hearth, no one but herself seemed aware that it was there. At all events no one, not even Bernard himself, ever noticed it. There it hung, however, during the whole first year of Mab's married life as fresh as on the morning when she first had twined it. The dewdrops still hung on the leaves, and the little threads of sunshine still shone amongst them. Mab

never failed to examine her wreath, as the Salamander had bidden her, every evening and morning, and rejoiced to find it always dewy fresh, and to inhale its dewy fragrance.

But at the end of the first year she had become so accustomed to find it always safe and sound, that she ceased to pay it quite so much attention ; besides, several "worries," as Mab called them, were beginning to engross her thoughts. Her neighbours had left off congratulating her upon her marriage. She had ceased to be an interesting young bride. She found herself of no more consequence than Dame Joan, or any other elderly matron, who had been married "hundreds of years." At village gatherings she stood aside with them, and all the fun and frolic, compliments, and cares seemed the lot of Nannette, Agnes, Lisa, and the other unmarried girls—this fretted Mab. Then Bernard seemed more taken up with his forge ; he did not care much now for dancing. He was graver, too, had ceased to call her his "Salamander," or to make pretty speeches. He paid more attention to his friends than to her, she considered. All this she thought, and some of it she said ; and, taken up by her imaginary griefs, did not notice that the dewdrops had dried off her wreath, and that its blossoms were drooping.

Bernard sometimes reasoned with Mab, but when his remonstrances produced no other effect than a burst of tears, passionate declarations that her affections were wounded and her love despised, and equally passionate protestations as to the depth and fervour of her attachment to him, Bernard looked

grave, and even angry, and would escape from these storms down to Marto's comfortable fireside, or to his friend Tonio the miller. Then Mab persuaded herself that she was the most neglected and unhappy creature under the sun, misunderstood, undervalued, slighted. And the more she wept and stormed, the more the wreath drooped and withered. But Mab never noticed it. Once indeed she was startled by finding on the hearth some faded leaves which had dropped from it. She was frightened for a time, and remembering the Salamander's warning, tears of real sorrow fell upon the wreath, and its drooping blossoms revived. But this improvement did not last long.

Mab succeeded in persuading herself that she, the selfish, exacting wife, was in the right, and that her true, sensible, and loyal husband was quite in the wrong. The head and front of poor Bernard's offences was, that, having built a house, and married a wife, he wanted to be *comfortable*. Love-making was a pretty amusement enough when an object was to be gained. But he had gained his object, he had married the woman he loved, and he had no idea of spending the rest of his life playing at cat and mouse ; that is to say, letting his prize seemingly escape him, and pursuing it again and catching it again, and so on for ever. The idea was not to be tolerated for a moment. He wanted to be at ease, and live in comfort, and when Mab reproached him with his coldness, and her own overwhelming affection, it is to be feared that Bernard would willingly have

been loved a great deal less if only he might have enjoyed a little more peace and quietness.

There were not wanting those who perceived Mab's mistake, and freely commented upon it. It was not, however, through the true and loyal Bernard that they learned the ugly secret ; but Mab's face, sometimes sulky, sometimes aggrieved, sometimes scornful, and sometimes tearful, had completely betrayed her—and one at least there was who, aware of the young wife's sad error, had resolved to turn it to her own advantage.

Nannette the heiress had never forgiven Bernard his preference for Amabel and neglect of herself, or pardoned Mab for having been the object of his preference. To sow fresh dissensions and discord between the husband and wife, to wound and injure Bernard, and, if possible, destroy poor little Mab, such were now the amiable motives of all Nannette's actions.

She began by pretending great friendliness for both ; made Bernard heartily welcome, and did her best to amuse and please him when he came to Marto's fireside to seek the comfort he could not find at home. And then she would visit the young wife, drop hints of compassion at her being left so much alone, and seek by every means to gain Mab's confidence. She succeeded only too well. Mab was glad to find some one who would listen and sympathize. Cousin Joan did neither the one nor the other, but told her roundly she did not deserve so good a mate ; and Agnes and Lisa would shrug their shoulders

and glance at one another, as much as to say, that whatever was wrong it must be all Mab's fault.

After each fresh confidence with Nannette Mab's wreath drooped more and more ; withered leaves dropped from it one by one. The threads of sunshine all died out, the fragrance had long ago departed, but Mab heeded it not.

"What, alone again !" exclaimed Nannette compassionately, as she entered the cottage one evening ; "Poor Mab ! poor Mab !"

"Why 'poor Mab ?' " asked the young wife, angrily.

"Because Bernard is so much away," replied Nannette carelessly. "I respect and like him greatly, as you know, but it is wrong—it is really wrong—to leave you as he does, and for—" She paused significantly.

"For whom—what do you mean ?" screamed Mab, stamping with impatience.

"What, do you not know ? poor child !" replied the wily Nannette, carefully noting in Mab's countenance the effect of her words. "Do you not know that he is always down at the mill ?"

"What then ?" asked Mab sharply.

"Have you not heard that Tonio's sister Blanche has returned from Grandeville ? She and Bernard are old friends—nay more, old lovers."

"It is a lie !" screamed Mab.

"Well, ask him himself when he comes home," said Nannette,

rising to take her leave, fearing lest she should be surprised by Bernard ; "mention Blanche's name and see how he takes it."

She nodded with a friendly smile, drew her hood over her head, and tripped down the mountain path, which Bernard was even then ascending.

Mab meanwhile was half beside herself with jealous fear and anger. Over the hearth her wreath withered more and more, the leaves dropping fast from it.

Whilst she was in this frame of mind Bernard entered the cottage.

"So you have come at last !" said Mab bitterly.

"At last !" have you been waiting ? I am sorry if you have," replied Bernard coldly.

"Oh, I may wait and wait, that is nothing—my love is nothing to you ; time was when you would have hurried home to your little Salamander, but that is all past !"

This was the wretched string on which Mab was perpetually harping. Bernard was heartily wearied of it, and, perhaps, showed as much in his face.

When A has once told B that he or she loves her or him truly and heartily, it is not only wearying to have to repeat the assurance over and over again, but the requiring such an assurance is an insult ; it implies a want of trust, and want of trust evinces a want of respect, and where respect is wanting true love cannot be. "Quietness and Confidence" are the marks of true love—the " stillest waters " are " the deepest ;"

the strongest feelings evaporate in the telling. Doubt is the worst insult that can be offered to love.

Some such thoughts possibly passed through Bernard's mind, but all he said was—"Is supper ready?" and drew his chair to the table.

Mab bit her lips.

"Where have you been? may one ask," said she, passing suddenly from the pathetic to the ferocious.

"No," replied Bernard gravely; "I will answer no questions from one who does not trust me."

"You have been to see Tonio's sister Blanche—deny it if you can," shrieked Mab.

"I do not deny it," said Bernard surprised, but with the same stern gravity.

At this confirmation, as she thought, of her worst fears, and irritated beyond endurance by Bernard's immovable composure, Mab burst into a storm of frantic tears and reproaches.

Bernard listened in silence, finished his supper calmly, and then rising, gravely said, "If you choose to behave like a senseless, passionate child, you must be treated accordingly," and leaving the room he locked the door behind him.

Mab at first writhed and screamed with fury, and plotted schemes of vengeance.

Meanwhile the wreath shed its last green leaf. It was now nothing but a few stalks bound together.

At last, as Bernard did not return, Mab's rage cooled down, and shame took gradual possession of her. "What have I done!" said she to herself. "Oh, will he ever come back? How he must despise me!"

The evening deepened into night; the pale moon looked in at the window; in the walnut tree outside a night bird sang delightfully. But for this and the gentle rustle of the leaves as a light breeze stirred them the hush was complete.

Then thought and reason resumed their mastery. Mab turned over and over in her mind that which had occurred. The indifference and contempt implied in Bernard's words and deed forced itself upon her and froze her heart with dread. "Will he ever love me any more?—can he ever respect me any more?" she sighed, and her tears fell bitterly.

The moon's rays filled the room. Mab wept till she was weary—when raising her eyes she saw a figure standing in the moonshine. It was the Salamander as she had appeared when she sank into the burning forge, with the grey hue upon her forehead and the pleading despair in her eyes, making a mute supplicating appeal as for a mercy she dared not hope to find; and Mab seemed to hear again Bernard's voice shouting scornfully, "Down with her, stifle her, smother her with snow!" The figure sank and fell, and where she fell upon the floor Mab saw a heap of snow!

"Bernard, Bernard, come back! come back!" she cried, half wild with terror; but Bernard never came.

The moon passed on her way, the room was left in total darkness, and Mab slept at length from sheer exhaustion.

When at length she awoke it was daylight. Her limbs were stiff, her eyes sore and weak with weeping. She sat up and looked about her. Bernard was quietly engaged in getting his breakfast. He did not notice her, but she sat watching him.

"Bernard," she said at length, as he prepared to depart. He looked round. "Bernard," she whispered softly. He came and stood beside her.

"Forgive me, oh, forgive!" She wept as if her heart was broken. As her hot tears fell one or two tender buds appeared on the empty stalks of the withered wreath.

"Mab," replied Bernard gently, "do you remember what you once told me you believed a Salamander to be?"

"Yes," whispered she—"a devil!"

Bernard had lighted the fire, and Mab, as she spoke, glanced fearfully towards it, starting with horror, as she encountered amongst the embers the malignant gaze of the dreadful being she had first seen at the forge.

"Oh, hide me, hide me!" she cried.

Bernard, unaware of the cause of her terror, soothed her with grave kind words.

"Rake out the fire," said she imploringly.

"Why so?" asked he surprised.

"I have a reason; rake it out, I pray."

He raked it out accordingly. "Does it remind you of the

Salamander we once talked about in happy days long ago? Ah, Mab, I was right when I called her Man's best friend, and you were equally right when you said she was a——"

Mab stopped his mouth with her little hand before he could utter that dreadful word. "Oh, say it not, say it not," she moaned.

"Shall bygones be bygones, Mab? shall we try to live those happy old days over again?"

Mab only answered by her tears.

"Then there must be no distrust. Without faith there can be no love. Ah, my girl, fire may burn and desolate as well as cheer and cherish!"

More kind words were spoken, and when at last Bernard was gone Mab felt happier than she had done for months past. For the first time after a very long interval it occurred to her to examine her wreath. She stood aghast when she found it leafless, but comforted herself at length by the discovery of little buds swelling on the stalks, one of which was already beginning, as she thought, to open. "Who knows but that it may blossom yet again?" said she, as she watered it with her tears.

As the day wore on she felt depressed and lonely. She longed for, yet half dreaded her husband's return. At all events he should find everything delightfully comfortable and snug she determined, and set about her domestic duties with more zeal than common. She was very tired and her head

ached, but the little cottage soon became under her hand a picture of comfort and neatness. Satisfied with this result, she took her work and sat down under the walnut-tree before the door.

It was a beautiful day, but heavy thunder-clouds were rolling up behind the cottage. Mab did not see them—her eyes were on the sunshine in the valley. There was an object there, however, which troubled the newly recovered serenity of her mind. She could see the river gliding by, and Tonio's mill upon its banks. She knew the road from the forge ran by the mill, and, in spite of her endeavours to turn her thoughts aside, was soon speculating on the possibility of Bernard pausing there again this evening.

The shadows began to lengthen, and Mab soon went in doors to prepare the evening meal. She was unusually successful ; a delicious little supper was soon ready for the table. Now if only Bernard would come in ! It was already somewhat past his time. If the supper spoiled it would be truly vexatious. Mab waited and waited, but Bernard did not come. This was too bad, and after all the pains she had taken ! She paced backwards and forwards between the table and the door a hundred times, and looked long and anxiously down the mountain path ; but no Bernard could be descried.

"He has gone to the mill, he is supping at the mill," at last she exclaimed aloud, bursting into angry tears. "Oh, it is cruel, it is wicked !" so she stormed and raged.

The sun went down, the supper was spoilt ; Mab rocked herself to and fro in angry grief. All the buds faded away one by one on the lately reviving wreath.

It was growing dark. The storm clouds had rolled up nearer. Mab went to the cottage door for the last time. She wiped her eyes and looked eagerly down the path. Some one was coming up it.

"Pshaw !" she exclaimed, turning back into the cottage. It was Nannette.

"Alone again !" said the latter, as she entered the door. "Ah, I knew as much. Bernard has not left the mill yet."

"How do you know he is there ?" asked Mab.

"How do I know ? My dear, every one knows ; and the road from the forge leads by the very door—so tempting, you know. But your supper shall not be wasted ; I will eat it with you. You make me feel so sorry."

Something in Nannette's voice and manner struck Mab unpleasantly. "You are not sorry, you are glad—I know you are glad," sobbed she.

"Glad of what ?" asked Nannette, with an accent of scorn she could not entirely conceal.

"You are glad Bernard neglects me, you are glad I am unhappy. You are glad because you wanted to marry Bernard yourself."

"I !!" exclaimed Nannette. An ugly expression passed over her face, but she restrained herself with an effort. "You are

not yourself, Mab, you do not know what you are saying—but I forgive you. How is it possible that I could ever have wished to marry Bernard, when I might have had any one I liked to name in Grandeville?”

“Then it’s a pity you did not stop there,” retorted Mab, growing more and more excited. “I am always more unhappy after you have been here—you make me think all sorts of horrid things.”

“Come, come, Mab, be reasonable,” said Nannette. “Bernard will not be home to supper, of that you may be quite sure. He is with company he likes better. It is a pity such a nice supper should be wasted ; I will eat it.” She drew a chair to the table, and seated herself as she spoke.

“You shall not,” exclaimed Mab, whose anger now overflowed. “You are taunting me, you are mocking me—I will not bear it.”

“Taunting you, mocking you !” repeated Nannette scornfully. “It is not I who taunt and scoff ; it is Blanche, Tonio’s pretty sister. How she must laugh to think that, whilst you are waiting here so patiently beside your nicely cooked supper for Bernard, he is sitting at her table, and thinking what a fool he was to have married you instead of her.”

“Will you go ?” screamed Mab ; “do you want to drive me frantic ?”

“Oh, you are that already,” replied Nannette, composedly, but rising as she spoke, “you want no driving. Now I look at

you, you are a contrast indeed to Blanche? I should think Bernard felt it deeply."

"Leave my house this instant," shouted Mab.

"Well, as you are so inhospitable as to refuse me any supper I will go of course," said Nannette, walking very slowly towards the door. When she reached it, she turned round, and said in an altered tone—

"You will repent this, Mab, one day, and that not a distant one. Bernard is even now with Blanche; she is as fair as you are brown; she is as tall as you are dwarfish; she is as gentle as you are fierce; and Bernard sees the contrast. All the neighbours see it too, and say, 'Poor Bernard!'"

Mab waited to hear no more; she rushed furiously at Nannette, who, taken unawares and frightened, screamed lustily for help. Help came in the form of a powerful arm which plucked Mab off, and threw her aside as if she had been a noxious insect. There was still light enough for her to see the expression of her husband's face as he did so; disgust and aversion were there, and he said sternly—"What is all this about?"

Without waiting for any answer from Mab he drew Nannette outside the cottage and pulled to the door.

"What is all this?—what have you done to provoke her?" he asked.

"Oh, Bernard, dear Bernard," sobbed Nannette, "I never was so frightened in all my life. I had only remonstrated with her about her temper, and she flew at me as you saw."

Bernard groaned. "Why are you out at all? you ought to be at home. Dame Joan has been taken suddenly ill; I have been to fetch the doctor; that has made me so late. Make haste home now."

At that moment came a vivid flash of lightning, soon followed by a heavy thunder clap. Nannette screamed and clung to his arm. "Oh, I dare not go home alone," she cried; "oh, do not, do not leave me!"

"I will take you home," said Bernard, "never fear. But run as quickly as you can, the storm is coming up heavily."

The same flash which had frightened Nannette had also startled Mab. In the second of time it had glared before her she had recognized in it the terrible face of the Salamander. Fright had checked her angry weeping, and she drew back as far as she could into the room. The storm rolled up faster and fiercer. Flash succeeded flash, and peal followed peal with frightful rapidity. Mab crouched in a corner of the room and hid her face on her knees. Presently a strange hissing sound made her look up. Down the chimney writhed a snake of living flame; its head was raised, its malignant eyes were fixed upon her; it had a human countenance, and that face was the face of the Salamander.

Mab shrieked, and darted towards the door, but the evil thing had rolled between it and her; its hissing filled her ears; its hot sulphureous breath scorched her face; its folds were already beginning to surround her. Above the raging of the storm

without she heard bursts of wild savage laughter, and mocking voices sang—

“The daughters of Fire, we spoil and destroy
Both places and hearts full of beauty and joy.
We ravage, we desolate, ruin and kill,
We know but one law—our own pitiless will.
We wear out the strong, and we crush down the weak,
On the noble and good our full malice we wreak.
The fierce Salamanders—the daughters of Flame,
We know neither mercy, nor pity, nor shame.”

The Salamander, hissing and raising herself aloft, darted towards the terrified Mab, who, with one last despairing cry to her husband to save her, sank insensible on the ground.

The heavens seemed on fire with the incessant lightnings; the horrid roar of the thunder, intensified by the mountain echoes, never ceased; the rain poured down in sheets of water, the hailstones gashed the trees and flowers, and crushed down the ungathered crops; the mountain torrents, swollen to furious cascades, leaped into the valley bearing down everything in their course; the once gentle river, lashed by the hail, and swollen by the mountain streams, rushed over its banks, broke down the mill, inundated the farms, and brought desolation wherever it flowed.

Who would have thought this could have been the end of a sweet summer day? When the sun rose next morning who would have recognized the smiling valley of a few hours back?

Trees were overthrown, crops destroyed, a broad turbid stream rolled its muddy sullen waters over what had been fruitful fields and fertile meadows. The roar of the mountain torrents drowned the sweet summer sounds ; the bridge was gone, the mill was gone, the village spire had been shattered by the lightning.

The elements had worked their will, in their passionate fury they had done what they would, and the paradise of yesterday was now a desert.

How long Mab lay insensible she never knew. When at last she recovered her senses she was in a strange room and lying on a strange bed. 'She tried to rise, but sank back faint from weakness ; a dull pain was in her head, she raised her hand and touched it. All her luxuriant black hair was gone. She looked at her hand ; it was wasted almost to a skeleton.

Too weak to think she lay in a state of dreamy wonder. At a footstep in the room, however, she roused herself and whispered, " Bernard."

The footstep approached the bed, the curtain was drawn aside by no gentle hand, and there by her side stood—not Bernard, but Nannette.

"What, not dead yet !" she said with a cruel laugh. "Poor Bernard ! is he not yet quit of his torment,—his Salamander ?"

Mab feebly groaned. "How strange," continued Nannette, as if half to herself, "how strange are the dispensations of Providence. My poor aunt Joan, who made every one happy about her, is dead ; Uncle Marto's heart is almost broken, and

here is Mab (whom we thought so much nearer death than dear Aunt Joan),—Mab, who made every one uncomfortable whom she came near, who was a burden and grief to her husband, come back to life to make Bernard's home still miserable ! Poor Uncle Marto, grieving so bitterly over the loss of his good kind wife ; and poor Bernard, deprived of the hope of at last having a gentle loving wife to make him happy !”

Mab lay still and listened in a sort of dream. She felt not a shadow of resentment. It did not seem to her as if the words were Nannette's ; they appeared to come from a long way off, and the voice sounded like that of the Salamander. A dull heavy grief oppressed her as she heard of Dame Joan's death, and of her cousin Marto's sorrow, but far deeper sank the grief as she heard him contrasted with Bernard.

Not for an instant, however, did she question the justice and truth of the comparison. “It is just, quite just,” she murmured. “Oh, if I could but die !”

Nannette caught the words. “It is indeed the only reparation you can make to Bernard,” she said, and left her.

Downstairs she found Bernard waiting for her.

“How is Mab ?” he inquired anxiously.

“Much the same,” answered Nannette.

“And I may not see her ?” he asked.

“You know the doctor has forbidden it.”

Bernard sighed. “You know of course that I leave Apeldorf to-night ?”

"Yes," replied Nannette ; "but I will take care of Mab, never fear."

"Thank you, dear Nannette, that is very kind ; but I have made another arrangement. I cannot take advantage of your goodness. Lisa's marriage will take place as soon after her mother's funeral as possible. Then Agnes will be all alone, and your uncle will feel his home still more lonely. You must go back to him. I have arranged with a friend to take your place—one with whom I feel I can thoroughly trust poor Mab."

"Do you mean that you cannot trust her with me?" asked Nannette, hastily.

"No, no, Nannette ; I should have said, 'with whom I can trust her as well as with you.' I shall never forget your kindness," he added, pressing her hand, "you have proved yourself Mab's best friend !"

In spite of this compliment Nannette did not look satisfied, and appeared very reluctant to give up her post. The more she said about it, however, the more delighted was Bernard with what he believed to be her forgiving spirit, and self-denying kindness, and the more bent was he on not taking undue advantage of her goodness. He named the day on which he desired her to return home, and then with a brotherly farewell, he left her.

Nannette looked after him scowling as he took the road to Marto's dwelling. "I shall lose all my chance of getting rid of Mab and of taking her place, if I cannot keep sole charge of

her," said she to herself. "I wonder who the friend is that Bernard talks of. How stupid it was of me not to ask him. I will run after him now and find out."

She started off to obtain the desired information. On her return a very strange expression was on her face, and a restless look in her eyes. "My time is short," she said, "but I will make the most of it."

During the interval till her return home Nannette admitted no one to her patient. She seasoned all Mab's food and medicines with bitter reproaches; she performed the services required by Mab's great weakness with roughness. But the invalid bore everything silently and patiently, thanking Nannette gently for every grudging service. Nannette was astonished; and still more so that Mab never once inquired after Bernard; she asked her one day the reason.

"I am not worthy to ask," was Mab's answer. "Why should he come and see so hateful a wretch as I am?"

Nannette was amazed at this reply, but said, "Ah, why indeed! Well, it is lucky you do not expect him, for you will never see him any more. He has left Apeldorf."

Mab involuntarily uttered a little cry. Then she pressed her hands over her heart and said to herself, "It is just—quite just, I have driven him away for ever." After a pause she added, "Tell me one thing, Nannette; is he well?"

"Oh, perfectly well," replied Nannette; "as well, that is, as a man can be who is tied to a wife like you."

"I would die if I could," sighed the poor girl piteously, "for his sake and my own I would die ! To be separated from him for ever, to have lost his love, that is far worse than death. Where is he gone ?"

"To Grandeville." Nannette came round to the foot of the bed and fixing her eyes on Mab's countenance, watched the effect of her words as she added, "Blanche's home is at Grandeville."

Mab only sighed. "Did you ever see her?" continued Nannette.

"No."

"They say she is as beautiful as an Angel."

"Ah."

"And so sweet and gentle she has not an enemy in the world. Bernard and she grew up together like brother and sister. Then came that war and they were separated, and then he took that most unfortunate fancy to you. He has found out his mistake by this time, poor fellow !"

The tears stood in Mab's eyes. "Poor Bernard !" she said ; "Poor Bernard !"

Do what Nannette would, she could not call forth one spark of the old fierce temper.

Soon after this conversation Mab became aware that something at the end of the room opposite to her moved whenever she moved, and imitated her every gesture. She was for some time too ill to discern what it was, but as her sight grew stronger

she perceived it was the reflection of herself in a looking-glass. But what a frightful thing was that reflection ! Mab felt quite afraid of it. The face had a worn, shrivelled look, and the fierce restless eyes, and close-cropped head gave it the appearance of an untamed, ugly monkey.

“And that is I !” thought Mab. “No wonder Bernard flies from me !”

Watching the appearance and movements of this repulsive object was Mab's daily and only occupation, and the remembrance of all she had heard of Blanche's beauty enhanced the ugliness of her own image.

As she grew a little stronger she felt curious to know what had been the matter with her, where she was, and how she had come here. But the sight of Nannette's cruel face always froze the question on her lips.

As the time drew near for Nannette to give up her charge her harshness to the poor invalid increased. She had hoped by jibes and taunts, and by reproaching her with the happiness she had flung away, to break Mab's young spirit, and perhaps throw her into such agitation or dejection as in her weak state might prove fatal. But Mab's patient submission, her willing resignation to a fate she felt she had deserved, defeated Nannette's wicked design. As she lay in quiet unrepining endurance, anxious to atone for the past by uncomplaining acceptance of the present, Mab's strength returned by degrees. Nannette saw plainly that she was foiled, Mab would soon be about again,

and the day must come when she would discover all her—Nannette's—falsehood.

One day, feeling a little stronger, Mab had fallen into a calmer, deeper sleep than she had as yet enjoyed. Awaking from it refreshed, she perceived that the room seemed more sunny than usual, and that a delicious perfume of flowers was in the air. She put aside the curtain and looked out into the room. Nannette was not there, but at the window, with the golden sunlight falling round her, sat a most beautiful creature. Mab gazed on her with wonder. Her eyes were blue, her hair like threads of sunshine. She was stooping over some piece of common needle-work, and her dress, only remarkable for its purity and neatness, was simple in the extreme. Her appearance was merely that of a lovely village maiden, but Mab never doubted it was the same Salamander who had appeared to her on her wedding-day.

She hardly knew whether to be frightened or soothed by her presence. But as her beautiful visitor went on working Mab continued to gaze on her, till her singular beauty—beauty born of sweetness and goodness—entranced her. Once or twice she glanced from the stranger to her own reflection in the mirror, and the contrast made the latter appear more hideous than ever.

At last the beautiful unknown raised her head, and seeing that Mab was awake threw aside her work and came towards her with a smile.

"Do you know who I am?" she asked bending tenderly over her.

"Oh, yes, the Salamander," said Mab breathlessly.

"The Salamander!" What can you mean?" The stranger raised her eyebrows with surprise, and then looked grave; she evidently thought Mab was lightheaded.

"But are you not?" said Mab earnestly. "Who are you, then? what is your name?"

"I am Blanche, Tonio's sister."

Mab closed her eyes, the room seemed to be turning round.

"Did you not know I was coming to nurse you? Bernard arranged it all before he went away. He left you in my charge till you should be well and strong."

"Till I am well and strong!" repeated Mab faintly.

"Ay, to be sure, and you will soon be that. Oh, you must be quite well and strong by the time Bernard comes back."

"Comes back!" said Mab astonished. "Will he ever come back?"

"Of course he will," replied Blanche, in a tone of astonishment,— "that is if he is spared," she added sadly.

"Where is he gone?"

"What, do you not know? Ah, poor dear, you have been too ill. There is fear of the war being renewed, and all the Apeldorf men who last served have been called out again. But do not look so frightened; many say the peace will not be broken. Bernard will come back soon, I am sure."

"But if he does come back," cried Mab raising herself in bed in her agitation, and fixing her eyes on her image in the mirror, "he will not wish to find me alive, he will wish to be free."

"Free to do what?—what can you mean?"

"Free to marry you! Ah, now I have seen you I understand it all. Oh, if I could but die!"

"Marry me!" Blanche's voice expressed the extremity of astonishment. Then she burst into a hearty ringing laugh. "Why, Mab, you must be dreaming, I am married already!"

"Married!" Mab sank back upon her pillow.

"Yes, married these six years. Why I have four children." And Blanche laughed again heartily.

Mab thought she must be dreaming indeed. "Where are they?" she asked.

"In Grandeville, with my husband. My mother-in-law is taking care of them till I return. I came to Apeldorf some weeks ago to see my own mother, who lives, as you know, with Tonio."

"At the mill. Ah," said Mab, "did not Bernard often go there?"

"Very often,—nearly every day at one time. He was helping my brother make some improvements in the machinery. He gave him so much of his time, my brother was quite ashamed, as Bernard would take no payment. But we three had been brought up together when we were children, so we have always been like brothers and sister. But poor Bernard's labour of love

was all wasted, as it happened, for the flood on the night of that dreadful storm destroyed Tonio's mill. Oh, what a night was that !" added Blanche shuddering.

Mab shuddered too ; not only at her recollection of that dreadful night, but at the remembrance of her unworthy suspicions of her generous-hearted husband.

Blanche did not know why Mab trembled and wept, she thought it was at the memories her words had recalled. She took her in her arms and soothed her like a baby.

"Tell me all, tell me everything, dear lovely Blanche," sobbed Mab. "Who brought me here?—how came I here?—and where am I?"

"I will tell you all I know," said Blanche gently. "Bernard was late home that night. Dame Joan had been taken suddenly ill, and he had been to fetch the doctor. On his way back, I suppose, I don't know where, he seems to have met Nannette, who was afraid of going home alone in the thunder-storm. So he accompanied her. I was with Dame Joan when they came in ; the storm became more and more terrible. Bernard insisted upon going back through it all to you, because he thought you would be frightened." (Mab groaned.) "We did all we could to persuade him not to do so, but he was quite determined. Then all was horror. I can scarcely tell you what happened. The alarm was raised that the mill would be washed away ; my mother was got out safe, and my brother rescued most of our valuables. My mother and I were both taken in by Marto.

Our terror about the mill put everything else out of our heads ; but in the morning Bernard came to us looking like a ghost."

Here Blanche paused, unwilling, apparently, to proceed. Mab entreated her.

"He had found his cottage in ruins. The lightning had splintered the walnut tree, and totally destroyed the house. He had found you, I believe, lying under some fallen beams ; you were quite insensible ; he carried you to the nearest cottage, where the neighbours willingly took you in, and there I found you. I would have nursed you, but my mother required all my care. Nannette offered most kindly to attend to you, and Bernard accepted her offer gladly. You had a fever, and were out of your senses a long time. Whilst you were still in that state the people who had this cottage left Apeldorf. Bernard took the house directly, and had you moved here. Then came the summons to Bernard and the Apeldorf men to join their troop ; before he left he entreated me to attend to you when Nannette went home. You know your poor cousin Joan is dead, and you know, I suppose, that Lisa has married my brother Tonio. Nannette is keeping Marto and Agnes company. Lisa is looking after my mother. Tonio started yesterday to join Bernard and the Apeldorf men, and I am nursing you," she continued smiling, "and my husband and little children are waiting for me in Grandeville, and wondering, perhaps, what has become of me ; but Bernard promised he would see them as he passed through the town and tell them all about it."

After this story Mab lay quite still and silent for a long time. She felt as if she had been suddenly awakened out of an ugly dream. But oh, how much worse did her conduct now appear, and, casting her eyes towards the looking-glass, the hateful object there appeared more odious than ever.

At length, holding out her arms to Blanche, she threw herself on her bosom, and whilst her tears fell fast, told her of all the wretched past, confessing without reserve her own irrational and violent conduct.

In the course of this narrative Nannette's falsehood, of course, appeared. Blanche was greatly shocked, but she did not say much ; she soothed and caressed the unhappy girl, speaking sweet words of hope, and at length had the satisfaction of seeing her fall into a quiet slumber.

From this day Mab's recovery was rapid, and soon she was strong enough to sit up, and even to venture into the garden. With the exception of Blanche she saw scarcely any one. Marto came once or twice, and Agnes and Lisa paid an occasional hasty visit. But the sight of them caused Mab so much shame, and brought back so many painful recollections that she was silent and sad in their presence, and they met with no encouragement to come again.

One day that Blanche had gone to visit her mother and Lisa, Mab, finding herself alone, with the prospect of an hour or two at her own entire disposal, was seized with a great desire to revisit her former home. Her present dwelling was in the valley,

and in her weak state it cost her a considerable effort to climb the mountain path. She accomplished it, however, after resting several times by the way, and at length reached the scene of her early married happiness.

Prepared as she was by Blanche's recital to see her home in ruins, the sight of the blackened heap, by which stood the walnut tree blasted and riven by the lightning, struck her with horror. She sat down on the ground, for her legs refused to support her, and gazed in tearless misery on the dismal scene. A cloud had passed over the sun, a low moaning wind came up from the valley, and sighed round the blackened walls. But for this there was not a sound to break the mournful silence.

Mab sat quite still looking and listening in the apathy which is born of despair. She could not weep, she could scarcely think, but as she listened to that wailing breeze its rustlings seemed to form themselves into words, words which Mab heard yet could not apprehend,—broken words which, as yet, she could not piece together into sense. With a stronger sigh the breeze swept past her, and the words were plain enough now—“Every wise woman buildeth her house; but the foolish plucketh it down with her hands.”¹

Mab started up; the voice was the voice of the Salamander, but it could not be she, Mab thought, there was not a single ray for the spirit of fire to lurk in. “It is true! it is true!” ex-

¹ Prov. xiv. 1.

claimed Mab, wringing her hands, "it is I, and I only, who have done it! It is I that have plucked down my home, and destroyed my own happiness."

She passed with faltering steps over what had once been the threshold, and gazed sadly and fearfully on the ruins of her pretty room. There were the remains of the supper table she had set out for Bernard on that memorable evening, and there lay objects she once had valued blackened by fire or drenched and destroyed by the rain. All at once Mab's eyes rested on something black in the form of a circle, half hidden under a heap of fallen beams. She stooped and drew it forth, then dropped it with a cry of horror. It was her bridal wreath! A twisted chaplet of charred sticks, but still her bridal wreath!

The floodgates of Mab's great sorrow now gave way; she wept with all the agony of despair. "No one but you can destroy it," the Salamander has said, "no power but yours can wither it." And here it was utterly withered, utterly destroyed, and oh, sorrow of sorrows, she herself had done it!

The wind now whistled and howled round the ruin. Mab thought she heard mocking laughter mingling with the sound. She took up the burnt wreath and laid it on her heart, and as she did so these words came distinctly on the blast,—*"They who sow the wind shall reap the whirlwind."*¹

¹ Hosea viii. 7.

Mab fled from the place in terror, bearing with her the black, charred wreath.

She met Blanche anxiously seeking her.

"Where have you been?" inquired the latter. "But I see," she added, looking compassionately on Mab's agonised face.

"Blanche," said Mab, "I have been looking on the ruins of my happiness."

"Ruins may be restored," said Blanche. "Tonio's mill is a ruin now, but as soon as he returns it will be rebuilt."

"I have seen the grave of my hopes."

"Buried hopes may spring up again with rain and sunshine. Look at this seedling oak."

"Those that are buried, perhaps, but not those that are dead—dead things can live no more."

"This myrtle was killed by last winter's frost, but see, it has budded again."

"A frost-nipped thing, perhaps, but not that which has been scathed by lightning."

"The walnut tree is alive still, though rent in twain; it will flourish still, you'll see, and bear fruit in plenty."

"Dead plants and trees may live once more," said Mab, "but dead joys never; and love once withered can never bloom again."

Not waiting to hear Blanche's answer she passed into the house, and going to her own chamber hung the dead wreath over the hearth. The ugly object in the looking-glass seemed to do the same. Mab looked at it and shuddered.

Morning, noon, and night Mab watered her wreath with her tears. To her it was always dead, black, and charred ; but Blanche saw that as Mab's tears fell upon it the black stalks lost their burnt appearance, they grew supple, tender, and full of sap. She pointed out the change to Mab, but the young wife could not see it.

The time was now come that Blanche felt her patient was sufficiently recovered to enable her to return to her own home. She had longed for Bernard to return before she left, that she might leave Mab in his care, and herself judge whether Mab's happiness was indeed gone for ever. But he came not, and only distant rumours reached Apeldorf of the whereabouts of himself and his companions. Blanche's heart ached to leave Mab so desolate and friendless, but she could not remain any longer away from her own home.

Her last words were words of comfort. "Your wreath is reviving, indeed, dear Mab, if you would only believe it. Indeed I can see little buds swelling on the stalks—see here is one that is almost in leaf."

Mab looked at it anxiously, but saw no sign of life.

"I was dear to him once," she sighed, "but how can Bernard ever tolerate a creature like that in his home?" She pointed as she spoke to the looking-glass.

"What do you see there?" asked Blanche, fixing her eyes not on Mab's reflection, but on Mab herself.

"I see a creature," answered Mab, "with cropped hair,

a withered face, fierce restless eyes, and an ugly cruel mouth."

"And I see," said Blanche smiling, "a little creature with large dark wistful eyes full of love and gentleness, a sweet loving mouth, a delicate cheek just beginning to round and bloom again with health, and a wealth of soft black hair." She touched Mab's hair which had grown again since her illness, and was wound in thick plaits round the graceful little head.

Mab smiled sadly and shook her head. "That is because you see me with the eyes of love," she said.

"And that is as Bernard will see you," replied Blanche hastily. But Mab again made a gesture of dissent.

At last Blanche was gone, and Mab remained alone. The summer had passed away, but the landscape basked in a warm September sun, and the woods glowed with the first rich tints of Autumn.

On Michaelmas Eve Mab was sitting working at her door, when the sound of voices made her look up, and she saw Marto and Lisa approaching. She ran to meet them.

"Good news, my girl," cried Marto, "good news—the great people for whom little people fight have settled their disputes peaceably, and our brave Apeldorf fellows are coming home."

Mab put her arms round Lisa's neck and kissed her happy face, but her heart was too full to speak.

"When will they be back, Cousin Marto?" she asked at length.

"I cannot say, my lass; for aught I know they may follow on the heels of the messenger who brought these happy tidings. You and Lisa must brush up your houses, for there's no saying how soon the masters may be at home."

Lisa laughed with pleasure, but Mab's heart sank.

She passed that night and the following morning in a state of feverish excitement. Her anxious looks turned incessantly from the looking-glass to the wreath; in the former her image was, if possible, more repulsive than ever, and the burnt wreath seemed ready to crumble to pieces at a touch. In the afternoon, however, she took her work, and, determined to school herself to patience and submission, sat down by her open window, before which hung a curtain of creeping roses, through whose leaves the warm sun shone cheerily upon her. As she alternately worked and meditated, the sunbeams seemed to fill her heart with comfort, a feeling of rest came over her, and a perfume far surpassing the fragrance of the climbing roses filled the room.

All at once she heard a man's voice singing in the distance. There was no mistaking it—it was Bernard's! Her heart seemed to stand still, and then almost suffocated her with its rapid pulsations. She could not move, but sat as spell-bound in her chair. She turned her eyes anxiously towards the open door. "The first glance will tell me if my happiness is gone

for ever, or if there is yet a hope," said she to herself. Now she could hear his footsteps nearer and nearer ; now he was unlatching the little garden gate. The sunshine filled the room, and that enchanting fragrance grew more powerful. He was come. He was standing at the door. Mab's eyes met his. Ah, one glance was quite sufficient, there needed no words to tell her that her wreath had blossomed once more.

When the first transports of that meeting were over, Bernard set off to announce his return to his old friend and partner, Marto ; and Mab remained behind, once more to wait for her husband, once more to busy herself in arranging for his comfort, and preparing his evening meal. When all was ready the happy girl went to the door to watch. The sun was setting, but the light in Mab's cottage was stronger than ever. She turned to see whence it came. It was pouring through the inner door, and the whole house was pervaded by the most delicious perfume. Mab went towards the inner door ; she mounted the narrow stair, and there, in her little room, stood the Salamander in the rays of the setting sun which flooded the apartment. Her face was sweet and smiling ; her glorious wings dropped sunshine, and she held in her hand the bridal wreath, as fragrant, as fresh, as dewy, as when Mab had first twined it on her wedding day.

The happy wife sank at the feet of the Salamander, who, placing the chaplet on her brow, said, "Take back thy wreath, my child, thy tears have restored it ; but take good heed it

Sister Mabel. "Was the story 'grown up' enough, Miriam?"

Miriam. "O quite, dear Sister, thank you."

Chorus. "Thank you, Sister, so much."

Sister Mabel. "It is no use waiting for the Penfold party; let us go in to tea."

As they walked towards the house Rose said, "I think I understand about the wreath, but there's one thing that puzzles me."

Lydia. "The looking-glass?"

Rose. "Yes, that is it, the looking-glass."

Harriet. "I was going to ask Sister about that."

Miriam. "Does it not mean, Sister, that Mab, in her shame and sorrow for her temper, saw herself so repulsive and odious that she was sure no one could endure her?"

Sister Mabel. "That is it, Miriam; the looking-glass evidently means Mab's self-contemplation."

Whilst one or two girls prepared the tea, Charlotte said, "How strange it seems that this is the last Michaelmas Day we shall ever be all together!"

Rose. "Oh, don't talk about it, Charlotte; it makes me melancholy!"

Sister Mabel. "Yes, partings are always sad; but I should feel glad and proud indeed if every girl that went forth from St. Mary's proved herself, whether married or single, whether

a happy mother, or a voluntary—or perhaps involuntary—‘old maid,’ a bright and cheery Salamander bringing warmth and sunshine wherever she goes. Remembering, always, that love is like fire,—unselfish, well-regulated, the greatest earthly blessing : selfish, exacting, ill-regulated, the bitterest curse. Love, however we may abuse it, is still the gift of GOD ; He has implanted it in every heart, in some more, in some less, but in *all* ; a precious talent to be cultivated for Him Who gives it. It may burn in our hearts a steady life-giving flame, or as a furious destroying blaze ; but if we ask of GOD He will so temper, so purify it, that it will always be the first and never the last,—always the symbol of His Presence¹—His Spirit within us, the token that we are the children of GOD. And with this pure and steady flame burning in our hearts, we may so kindle the same divine spark in others, that all the world will grow warm and bright around us. Whether as the gentle wife, the careful mother, or as the happy ‘old maid’—with her heart so at leisure that she can sympathize with, and help, every one who needs help and sympathy ; whether as the ‘Sister of Mercy,’ or the cloistered Nun, every woman may so prove herself a ‘daughter of Light.’ How suggestive are those words of our Terce Hymn,² in which we invoke the source of all

¹ 1 St. John iv. 12, 13, 16.

² The “third hour,” 9 a.m., at which the Invocation to the HOLY GHOST is sung.

Love,¹ Himself compared to fire,² to kindle this flame of heavenly love in our poor hearts :—

‘By every power, by heart and tongue,³
By word and deed, Thy praise be sung ;
*Inflame with perfect love each sense,
That others’ souls may kindle thence.’*

Dear children, be this our fervent daily prayer.”

¹ 1 St. John iv. 7, 8.

² Heb. xii. 29.

³ “Os, lingua, mens, sensus, vigor
Confessionem personent,
Flammescat igne charitas,
Accendat ardor proximos.”

the 1930s, the 1940s, and the 1950s, and the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s.

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